

HELLBLAZER

JAMIE DELANO JOHN RIDGWAY ALFREDO ALCALA



VOLUME TWO

FOREWORD BY CLIVE BARKER



The character of John Constantine was created by Alan Moore,
Stephen Bissette and John Totleben.

HELLBLAZER VOLUME TWO

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HELLBLAZER

VOLUME TWO

Written by JAMIE DELANO
Drawn by JOHN RIDGWAY
Inked by JOHN RIDGWAY and ALFREDO ALCALA

TITAN BOOKS

BIOGRAPHIES

JAMIE DELANO

Prior to entering the comics field, Jamie Delano held a variety of occupations from librarian to chainsaw operator, while he read voraciously and wrote for pleasure. Alan Moore, an old friend, helped him achieve his first commission in 1983: the *Nightraven* text stories published in *Marvel Superheroes* for Marvel UK. The following year he took over from Alan on *Captain Britain* and, in 1985, wrote *Dr Who*, both for Marvel UK. The same year he wrote his first *Future Shocks* for Fleetway's *2000 AD*, continuing until Karen Berger at DC Comics asked him to write *Hellblazer* in 1987. This he still does, and has also written a six part series for DC, *World Without End*, drawn by John Higgins, for late 1989 publication.

JOHN RIDGWAY

Entering comics in 1967, John Ridgway produced eight-page tales for Fleetway titles such as *Battle Picture Library*, *War Picture Library* and *Air Ace Library*. The following year he began drawing for DC Thomson's *Commando War Stories* series, which, alongside a day job as a design and project engineer, occupied him until the arrival of Quality's *Warrior* in 1981, for which he drew stories by Alan Moore, Steve Parkhouse and Grant Morrison. Between 1984 and 1987 he drew *Dr Who*, *Transformers* and *Zoids* for Marvel UK and *Enid Blyton's Famous Five* for Guttenburghus. Meanwhile, he also drew several one-off fill-in episodes for Marvel US for whom he has also drawn a graphic novel, *The Agent*. His *Hellblazer* work was executed in 1987-88. For Fleetway's *2000 AD* he has drawn *Future Shocks*, *Judge Dredd* and *Summer Magic* (1988 and 1989) and is now drawing John Wagner's series, *The Dead Man*. His busy schedule also includes writing and drawing *The Legend of Sigmar Heldenhammer* for Games Workshop's new *Warhammer* comic.

ALFREDO ALCALA

A native of the Philippines, Alfredo drew comics from an early age. In 1948, he became a professional, drawing stories for *Aksyon* and *Filipino* comics. DC's talent sweep in 1971 led to Alfredo working on DC's mystery line. He then worked on a variety of comics for Marvel, DC and others including *Savage Sword of Conan*, *Incredible Hulk*, *Man-Thing*, *Batman*, *Detective Comics* and *Kamandi*. He has created his own comic character, *Voltar*, for Comics and Comix' *Magic Carpet* #1, and produced the comic history of the Statue of Liberty, and the 1987 *Shadow Annual* for DC. He continues to ink *Swamp Thing* and occasionally *Hellblazer* from his home in San Francisco.

FOREWORD

It is only recently that the dark side of the British imagination has been seen to full effect in comic books. Its leading exponent, of course, is Alan Moore, and it was in Alan's *Swamp Thing* stories that the character who stumbles, fornicates and curses his way through these pages first appeared.

His name is John Constantine.

His adventures are grim, but graced with a black humour that manages to keep depression at bay.

Why depression? Because Constantine's world is (demons apart) our own world. These are stories that touch upon the issues of the day. AIDS, nuclear waste, the rise of neo-Nazism, street violence.

A grim picture. But then, horror fiction should be grim, or else it simply becomes a wallowing in Grand Guignol. *Hellblazer* contains enough of that to keep any splatterpunk happy — and a good deal more besides.

Tough stuff, but you'll have plenty to chew on.

Clive Barker
May 1989

INTRODUCTION

There is a view held in certain quarters which treats that a horror story — whilst providing a prurient and vicarious *frisson* of terror — should be at pains to reassure the reader that such horrors that have been delineated are, after all is said and done, subject to some nullifying and protective force of natural justice — that the grotesque toys can be put back in the box when the creative playtime is over. I don't subscribe to that view. I think horror should rub our noses in the disgusting and unpalatable — to force us to use our own imaginations to find ways to bear the unbearable and face the faceless. I'm not in the business of providing comfortable panaceas in the form of supernatural benevolences that might encourage us to believe that it's not our fault or concern.

After Western movies, I think it was the war in Vietnam that, as a child, first attracted my attention to the USA as a concept. Before that grotesque theatre of blood and fire began its ten-year domination of the media and political culture to become — as Constantine remarks, '*A movie-war, fought mainly on TV in front-rooms round the world*' — my closest experiences of violent international conflict were vague stories of the Second World War related by parents or the fathers of friends, and playground games of 'Japs and English'.

For me, growing up in a peaceful county-town suburb ten thousand miles away from Indo-China, this war invoked a kind of mind-numbing, appalled fascination — somewhat akin to the sort of ghastly wonder with which children are apt to regard dead dogs in gutters or spiders devouring flies. This was a real horror that was happening — a horror that was thrust on us, from which we could not turn away. I don't think that you had to be a soldier, or even an American or Vietnamese, to feel its impact on the world. The war was a blind, stupid, pain-enraged beast. It was a monstrosity, an aberrance, a freak of nature. Trapped in a web of scorched and broken life — a wounded insanity which bled liquid fire on babies while we ate our tea. And that, I believe, gives anyone the right to comment.

I say all this not to labour the point or to add spurious words to the many millions already written on the subject, but to indicate that, to me, the Vietnam War was not just a collection of individual experiences, both ennobling and degrading; nor just a product of arrogant and cynical political science; nor just a victory or defeat. It was an icon of terror. A thing goaded and inflamed and then turned loose to rampage, implacable, wild and unrestrainable. It was a force so far beyond our control as to assume the nature of something supernatural — god-like — a primal and disabling force.

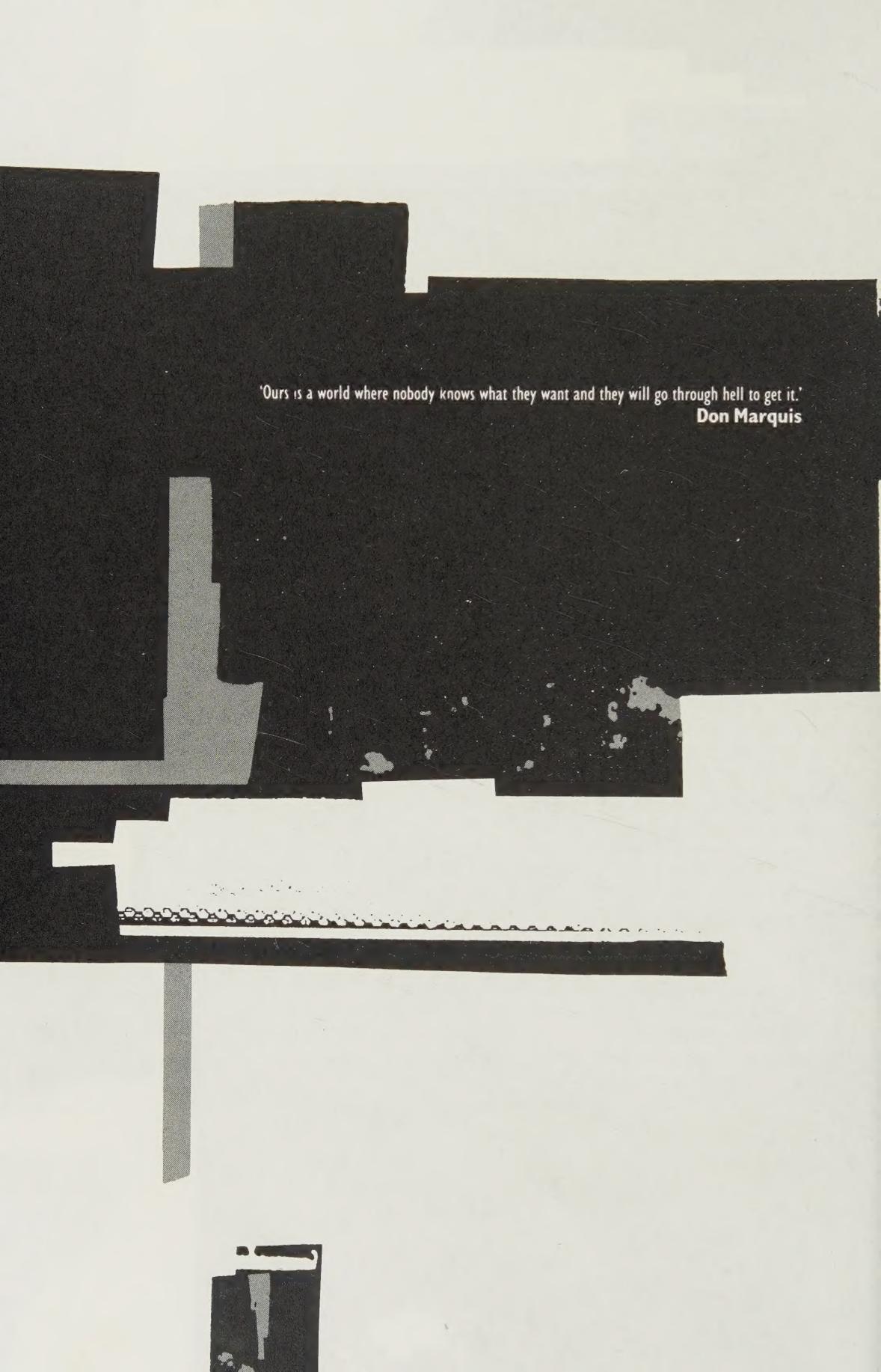
The first story in this volume — *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* — was not in any way intended to be an attempt to get close to the true nature of the war in Vietnam as experienced by its participants in the same way that *Platoon* or *Full Metal Jacket* (on whose band-wagon we were accused of jumping) did. In fact, I don't think the story was ever really *about* Vietnam in any historical sense at all. I can't be one hundred per cent sure, (stories, it seems, are often flexible in interpretation even to their authors) but I think that this one was primarily about victims. It was an attempt to show women as victims of men and fear; men as victims of fear, ignorance and 'team-spirit'; Americans as victims of xenophobic incomprehension; the inhabitants of Liberty as victims of the incapacity of old minds struggling with a new world, one of blind faith in a falsehood. Finally, it was an attempt to show the dead soldiers and the Vietnamese as victims of a hugely brutal force which wields great power with the callous, arrogant and irresponsible finesse of nuclear fission.

To me, the war, as portrayed here, is a foreshadowing, a prescience of the evolution of that crazed, terrified desperation which, though we mask it with a rictus of reckless self-confidence, drives us remorselessly, with the divinely masculine force of bulldozers, into the warm, wet, female rainforests of extinction. I don't know about you. But *that's* what scares the shit out of me.

I'm not going to make a habit of providing lengthy explanations/justifications of the stories in these volumes — but this one seemed to attract a reasonable amount of comment and criticism and, although it may not have succeeded fully in its aims, I'd be hard-pressed to think of a more valid theme for a horror story. It's still one of my personal favourites and we're up to number twenty-four now.

There are three other stories in this volume which, loosely, begin to build a background continuity involving the Resurrection Crusade and the Damnation Army. This is basically a tale of everyday hard-line fundamentalist Christians opposed by the devious machinations of hellish fifth-columnists and dirty-tricks specialists. Who's good — who's evil? Difficult to say — neither side seems to care too much for the well-being of humanity as a whole. The stories also serve as a platform on which to broaden and deepen the character of Constantine. I hope you enjoy them.

Jamie Delano
Northampton, May 1989



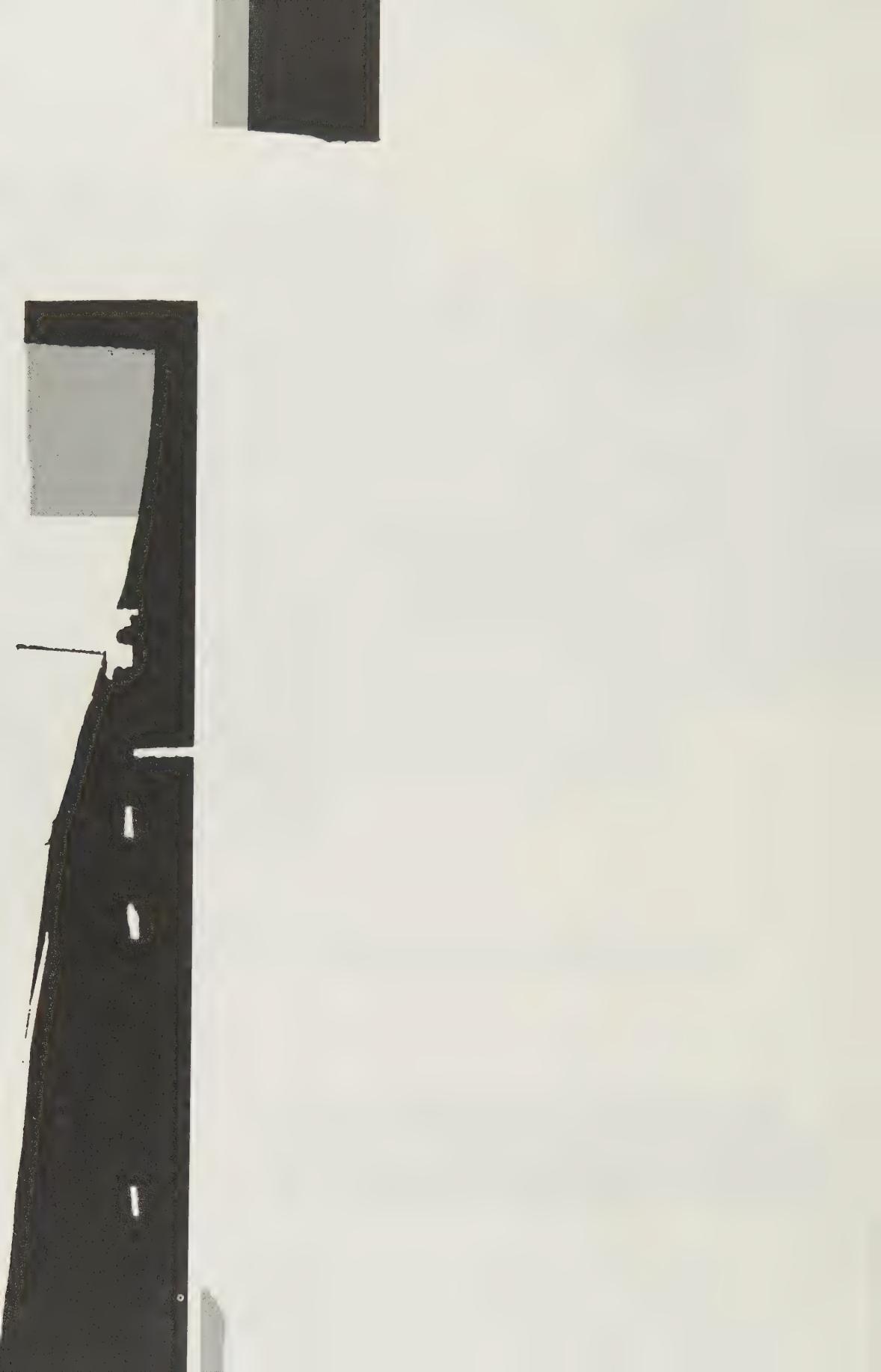
'Ours is a world where nobody knows what they want and they will go through hell to get it.'

Don Marquis



CHAPTER ONE

WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME



AUGUST 10TH, 1968. QUANG TRI PROVINCE, VIETNAM.

HUP, TWO, THREE, FOUR.
I LOVE THE MARINE CORPS.

633567

LIEUTENANT FRANK ROSS CAN'T STOP THE MORONIC CADENCE MARCHING THROUGH HIS HEAD. THEY'RE EIGHT HOURS INTO THIS CRAPPED-OUT MISSION -- AND HE'S HAD A GUT-FULL.

HUP, TWO...

DEEP PENETRATION THEY CALLED IT. HAH, IT WAS THEM LARD-ASSES AT DIVISION NEEDED PENETRATION.

...THREE, FOUR.

HOW MANY SHADES OF GREEN IN ONE STINKING JUNGLE? HOW MANY SLOPE EYES SQUINTING DOWN CARINES?

I LOVE THE MARINE CORPS.

SWEAT, VISCOUS AS SLOBBER, DRIBBLES INTO HIS EYES, SO THAT HE CAN'T SEE THE TRIP-WIRES -- THE PANG-STICKS.

THE HEAT IS ALIVE. IT SMOOTHERS HIM WITH ITS BREATHLESS BODY, RAPING HIS SKIN WITH A NEEDLE-BARBED TONGUE.

A SUDDEN RUSTLING IN THE GREEN HAS THE UNIT WRIGGLING TO BURY THEM-SELVES -- LIKE TOADS.

AMBUSH!

BADDY
BADDY

AGAIN, INVISIBLE MOVEMENT -- CLOSER.

SKIN TIGHTENS TO RECEIVE THE LOVE-BITES OF BULLETS.

IT'S CRAIG ANDERS WHO BREAKS THE TENSION, HIS M16 COMING SAVAGELY INTO THE HOT, DENSE AIR -- TRIGGERING THE OTHER WEAPONS TO FLAIL THE TREES WITH THEIR LEADEN EJACULATIONS.

BADDY
BADDY

AUGUST 10TH, 1987.
LIBERTY, IOWA.

NO WIND TODAY. THE CORN STANDS STOCK STILL, WAITING. BE STORMS SOON.

FIRST, IT STARVED THE TOWN OF TRAFFIC AND TRADE -- THEN TOOK OFF THEIR SONS TO THE WAR, TO BE LOST, MISSING IN ACTION.

DAUGHTERS, ABANDONED BY THE FUTURE, LEFT ON THE BUS, OR IN STRANGE MEN'S CARS.

THEY HAVE WAITED AND PRAYED-- NOW SOMETHING IS HAPPENING.

THE RESURRECTION CRUSADERS WERE RIGHT. THE LORD HAS TAKEN CHARGE. THE GOVERNMENT SURE AS HELL HASN'T HELPED--BUT THE PRAYERS HAVE.

SOMETHING IS MOVING IN THE CORN. STRONG STALKS PART-- LIKE A BAMBOO CURTAIN.

SON, IS THAT--



THE DWINDLING POPULATION OF LIBERTY GREW OLD WITH NO GRANDCHILDREN TO ENVY. BUT IN THEIR HEARTS, THEY ALWAYS KEPT FAITH WITH THEIR BOYS.



ALL THE CHEATED PARENTS OF LIBERTY FEEL IT. SOON THEY WILL REJOICE. THE LOST SONS OF LIBERTY ARE COMING HOME FROM THE WAR.



THE WORLD PASSES BY AT A
DISTANCE, FLUTTERING WILLY
ANDERS' HEART WITH
FAMILIAR ANGER.

OVER ON THE INTERSTATE,
SOFT TIRES PEEL FROM HOT
TAR-LIKE STICKING-PLASTER.

IT WAS THAT DAMNED
ROAD KILLED LIBERTY.

--YOU...?

A black and white illustration of a hand holding a cigarette. The hand is in the lower right, gripping a cigarette with a lit end. The background is textured and dark. Across the top and bottom of the frame, the word 'BADDABADDA' is repeated in a stylized, jagged, and slightly tilted font, giving it a dynamic, energetic feel.

WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME

DELANO, WRITER • RIDGWAY, ARTIST • KLEIN, LETTERER • BERGER, EDITOR

BRIEF PASSION SPENT, THERE
IS A MOMENT WHEN SILENCE
Drips, like syrup, from the
BROKEN ENDS OF BRANCHES.

JUST ONE OLD GOOK. ANDERS'
BURST JUST ABOUT CUT HIM
IN HALF.

DON'T LOOK LIKE CHARLIE. STILL,
THE BRASS SAY, IF IT'S YELLOW
AND DEAD -- IT'S AN ENEMY.

WHASSA MATTER, MAN? YOU LOOK
LIKE YOU WOKE UP AND FOUND
YOURSELF HUMPING YOUR GRANNY.

HUH? AW, NOTHIN' SIR.
MUST BE THE GODDAMN HEAT,
I GUESS. FOR A SECOND HE
LOOKED JUST LIKE MY
POP. JUST SHADOWS,
OR SOMETHING.

GET A GRIP, BOY.
TAKE ANOTHER
LOOK.

I KNOW YOUR OLD
MAN -- AND HE AIN'T NO
SLANT-EYED, YELLOW-
SKIN GOOK!

NICE SHOOTIN', ANDERS.
CHALK UP ANOTHER ONE FOR THE
BOYS FROM LIBERTY.

YOU BEEN SMOKING
THAT LAOS GRASS AGAIN?

HE'S AN AMERICAN --
JUST LIKE YOU AND ME.

HUH, TWO, THREE, FOUR.
I LOVE THE MARINE CORPS.

AND RE-LOAD THAT
WEAPON, SOLDIER

OKAY, BOYS.
MOVE OUT.

NOW, HAUL ASS,
YOU DUMB GRUNT.
WE GOT A WAR
TO FIGHT.

ALONE IN HIS DUG-OUT BY THE SIDE OF THE
INTERSTATE, FRANK ROSS SITS, WAR FLICKERING
THROUGH HIS HEAD, LIKE THE PASSING TRAFFIC.

GAS

HE TAKES COMFORT FROM A COLD
GLASS BOTTLE. LIQUOR BLURS THE
PARADE OF DEAD FACES.

LIBERTY
CORNER

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN--WHEN
THE HEAT SWEATS THE BLACK MEMORIES,
TWITCHING THEM RESTLESSLY IN THEIR
BODY-BAGS.

Nearly twenty summers
he's been through this.
This year's the worst.

SINCE THE OLD FOLKS OVER IN LIBERTY
HAD GOTTEN ALL FIRED UP WITH THAT HOLY-
ROLLER CRAP--

HE WISHES THEY'D ALL HAVE
CORONARIES IN THE CORN, LIKE NANCY'S
PA. THEIR LIVES WERE KNIVES TWISTING
IN HIS GUILT.

CHRIST, IF THEY ONLY KNEW.

THEY HATED HIM BECAUSE HE'D
COME BACK--AND THEIR SONS
HADN'T.

AND NANCY--SHE
OUGHTA BE BACK
BY NOW.

--HE'D HAD
NO PEACE
FROM THE
WAR.

BECAUSE HE MADE A LIVING
OUT OF THE INTERSTATE --
AND THEY DIDN'T.

WHAT IF SHE EVER FOUND
OUT THE TRUTH ABOUT FRANK
ROSS, THE WAR HERO?

AFTER A WHILE THE HEAT
DISTRACTS HIM. HE FORGETS
TO DRINK, AND--SURE AS
SHOOTING--THE PARADE OF
FACES MARCHES HIM BACK
TO 'NAM.



THE SKY HERE
IS TOO BIG.

IT'S HOT, OPPRESSIVE WEIGHT PRESSES
OVER THE FLATTENED GROUND--SQUEEZING
THE ROAD OUT OF THE HORIZON, LIKE
TOOTHPASTE.

I'M ONLY S'POSED
TO BE IN THE
STATES FOR A
QUICK VISIT--TO
CHECK UP ON THE
SWAMP THING.

NINETEEN YEARS AGO TODAY THE
UNIT WENT MISSING--AND THE BUS
WENT RIGHT PAST THE TOWN. YOU
CAN'T JUST IGNORE COINCIDENCES,
CAN YOU? REAL MAGIC DOESN'T
ADVERTISE.

LIBERTY'S A COUPLE OF MILES
OFF THE INTERSTATE.

IF I'VE GOT TO WALK,
I'M GOING TO NEED
A DRINK.

BUT I READ IN THE ENQUIRER ABOUT
THE RESURRECTION CRUSADERS AND
THIS TOWN--WHERE THE PEOPLE REFUSE
TO GIVE UP HOPE FOR THEIR MIA SONS.

THE GUY'S EYES TELL
ME THERE'S NO POINT
IN TALKING.

I SAVOR THE TASTE OF
THE GUN. SUCH THINGS
ARE RARE EXPERIENCE.

FRANK! NO,
DON'T!

THE COLD, OILED METAL SLIPS
FROM MY LIPS. PATIENTLY I WAIT
FOR MY HEART TO START
BEATING AGAIN.

HERE'S
YOURS, YELLOW
BITCH!

N-NANCY?

TWO DECADES AND HALF A WORLD AWAY, LIEUTENANT ROSS CROUCHES IN THE FILTHY PIG-RUN OF HIS MEMORY-- AND WAITS FOR CHARLIE TO FIND HIM.

HIS WORLD SHAKES WITH THE FURIOUS FEAR OF WAR. THE VC ARE CLOSING IN. HE PRAYS FOR DELIVERANCE.

WHERE ARE THE PLANES?

A SHADOW FALLS ACROSS HIM.

HELLO, MATE, ANY CHANCE OF A COLD...

BLAM
BLAM

...BEER?

JESUS GOD, MISTER. WHAT CAN I SAY? JUST STAY PUT WHILE I GET HIM TO BED.

HONEY, I'VE GOTTA GO BACK. PA AIN'T EVEN BURIED YET. MA NEEDS ME.

WHAT ABOUT ME? I DON'T WANT TO BE ON MY OWN EITHER. YOU KNOW WHAT DAY IT IS.

IT'S SCARY.

I SHOULD GO--NOW.

C'MON, BABY, MOMMA'S GOT YOU.

COME WITH ME, FRANK. THEY'RE ALL CRAZY IN TOWN--LITTERLY CONVINCED THAT PYRAMID OF PRAYER'S GONNA BRING THE BOYS BACK.

BUT IT'S TOO LATE. I'M ALREADY PLUGGED INTO THE CLAUSTROPHOBIC HORROR OF THESE PEOPLE'S PRIVATE LIVES.

CLAUSTROPHOBIA INSIDE--
AGORAPHOBIA OUT.

I'M REAL SORRY, MISTER. FRANK WAS
WOUNDED IN THE WAR. GOT A
PURPLE HEART--

SHOULD BE ABLE
TO BLAG A LIFT TO
LIBERTY THOUGH.
SHE'S BOUND TO
FEEL OBLIGED.

--BUT HE CAME
HOME A BIT
CRAZY.

WHAT'S YOUR
PROBLEM, ANYWAY?
CAR BROKE
DOWN?

NAH, IT'S A BIT BLOODY
SILLY REALLY. I GOT OFF
THE BUS TO TAKE A PEE
AND THEY WENT
WITHOUT ME.

IS THERE A MOTEL IN LIBERTY?
I'D HITCH IT, BUT I'M A BIT
SHOCKED UP, LIKE.

WELL, SORT OF. DON'T
GET MANY VISITORS
SINCE THE INTERSTATE
CAME BY--MY MA
OWNS IT.

SOUNDS
PERFECT.

I S'POSE IT'S THE LEAST I CAN DO. BUT I WARN YOU,
THE FOLKS ARE A BIT STRANGE JUST NOW. THEY ALL
LOST KIN IN THE WAR -- MIA.

NOW THIS TV PREACHER
SAYS HE'S GONNA PRAY
TO BRING THEM BACK.

GOT THEM PSYCHED UP
LIKE A FOOTBALL COACH.

IT'S GONNA
BREAK MA'S HEART
WHEN NOTHING
HAPPENS.

OVERHEAD, OMINOUS
THUNDERHEADS GATHER,
LIKE TUMORS.

SO, YOU SURE
ABOUT THIS?

IT'S HERE, ALL RIGHT. YOU CAN FEEL
IT. BULBOUS, BLOATED, THE
IRRESISTIBLE TENSION--THE PROMISE
OF EMOTIONAL LIGHTNING.

YEAH.
WHY NOT?

LIBERTY

THE MOTEL CABIN IS LIKE A SET FROM PSYCHO.

THE WHOLE OF LIBERTY IS A TWENTIETH-CENTURY GHOST TOWN. ALL THAT'S MISSING IS THE TUMBLEWEED.

THIS MAY BE THE RIGHT PLACE, BUT IT FEELS LIKE THE WRONG TIME.

TODAY'S THE DAY.

YOUR BROTHER WON'T MISS HIS PA'S BURYIN'. CRAIG'LL BE BACK BY MORNIN'. YOU'LL SEE, GIRL.

WE'RE TOP OF THE PYRAMID TONIGHT. GOD'S EYE IS ON US. HE'S GONNA PUT THINGS RIGHT.

WHATEVER IS BREWING HERE, I'M NOT GOING TO BE ABLE TO STOP IT.

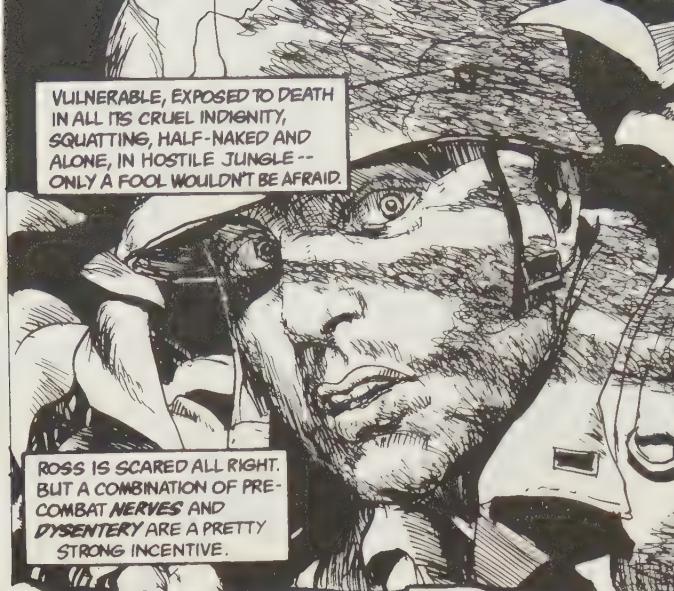
MA, PLEASE. IT SCARES ME WHEN YOU TALK THIS WAY. IT'S BEEN TWENTY YEARS. YOU'VE GOTTA ACCEPT IT. THEY AIN'T NEVER COMING BACK!

SHUT YOUR LYING FACE, TRAITOR SLUT! IT'S ALL RIGHT FOR YOU, LIVING DOWN THERE ON THE INTERSTATE.

FRANK ROSS CAME HOME!

I'M JUST A NEUTRAL OBSERVER --OR MAYBE VOEUR WOULD BE MORE ACCURATE.

IT'S GROWN TOO FAT. NOW IT'S RIPE TO SPILL ITS GUTS ALL OVER LIBERTY.



VULNERABLE, EXPOSED TO DEATH
IN ALL ITS CRUEL INDIGNITY,
SQUATTING, HALF-NAKED AND
ALONE, IN HOSTILE JUNGLE --
ONLY A FOOL WOULDN'T BE AFRAID.

ROSS IS SCARED ALL RIGHT.
BUT A COMBINATION OF PRE-
COMBAT NERVES AND
DYSENTERY ARE A PRETTY
STRONG INCENTIVE.

IT IS TIME. TIME TO
END IT.

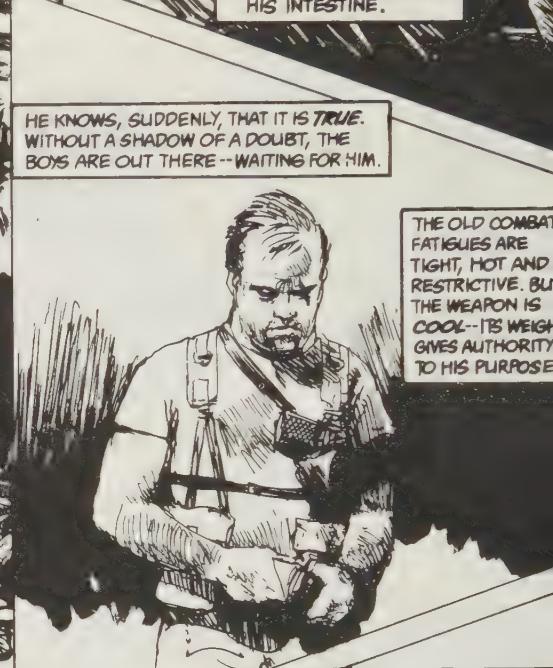


JOLTED AWAKE
FROM A HOT BLACK
SALINA NIGHTMARE
THE OLD, FAMILIAR
FEAR-COILS
TIGHTENING--



HIS FEAR THROBS, LIKE A BOIL WHICH
CAN ONLY BE LANCED BY VIOLENCE.

EXISTENCE IN 'NAM
IS A CYCLE OF
BOREDOM, FEAR
AND VIOLENCE.



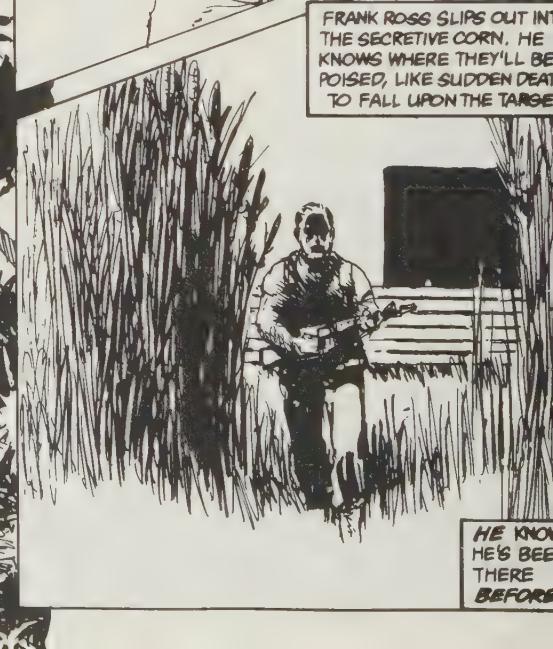
HE KNOWS, SUDDENLY, THAT IT IS TRUE.
WITHOUT A SHADOW OF A DOUBT, THE
BOYS ARE OUT THERE -- WAITING FOR HIM.

THE OLD COMBAT
FATIGUES ARE
TIGHT, HOT AND
RESTRICTIVE. BUT
THE WEAPON IS
COOL -- ITS WEIGHT
GIVES AUTHORITY
TO HIS PURPOSE.



IT WEARS A MAN OUT--
MAKES HIM OLD. 'TIL
DEATH IS ONLY A LONG-
PROMISED CLIMAX,
WAITING TO BE FULFILLED.

JUST AHEAD, THE UNIT
WAITS FOR HIM TO LEAD
THE ASSAULT ON THE
SUSPECT HAMLET.



FRANK ROSS SLIPS OUT INTO
THE SECRETIVE CORN. HE
KNOWS WHERE THEY'LL BE
POISED, LIKE SUDDEN DEATH,
TO FALL UPON THE TARGET.

HE KNOWS
HE'S BEEN
THERE BEFORE

HE FINDS THEM. THEY LOOK LIKE MEN WHO'VE MARCHED NINE HOURS THROUGH HELL. HUNKERED DOWN AROUND THEIR WEAPONS, THEY COULD BE ASLEEP, OR DEAD.

ROSS KNOWS THAT THEY ARE NEITHER.

WIDE EYES FLASH FROM ASHEN FACES AS HIS ARRIVAL ROPES IN THEIR TETHERED MINDS. ANDERS ROLUSES THEM.

GOOD MAN, ANDERS.

WHAT'S THE TARGET STATUS?

JUST ANOTHER CRUMMY BUNCHA HUTS. SEEMS QUIET, FEW OLD FOLKS--NO SIGN OF CHARLIE.

OKAY, WE MOVE IN AND SEARCH, SHOOT THE PLACE UP A BIT AND ROUND UP ALL THE SLOPES.

MOST TIMES IN 'NAM, YOU DON'T SEE CHARLIE -- 'LESS HE'S DEAD.

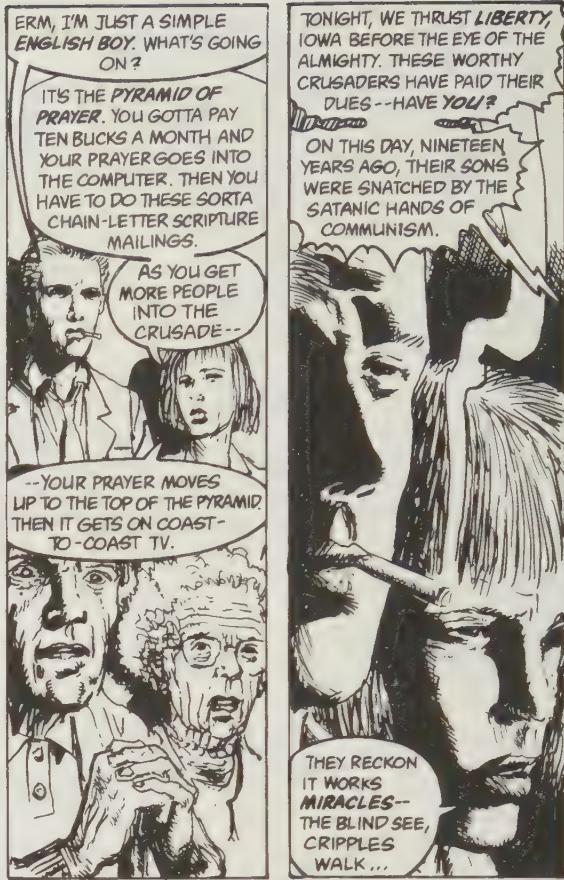
ANYBODY RUNS -- BLOW 'EM AWAY. THEY MUST HAVE A GUILTY CONSCIENCE.

FRANK ROSS KNOWS ALL ABOUT BUILT AND RETRIBUTION.

HE LEADS THEM FROM THE CONCEALING CLOAK OF VEGETATION.

THIS TIME HE WON'T LET THEM DOWN. THIS TIME HE'LL STAY WITH THEM.

THIS TIME HE'LL CHOOSE DEATH AND LIBERTY.



GUNFIRE AND YELLING DECIMATE THE DEEP GREEN QUIET OF DUSK--
AS ROSS AND HIS MEN BLAST THEM OUT OF THEIR MOVELS.

NO RESISTANCE.

THE GRUNTS ROUND UP THE SULLEN GOOKS
AND FIRE THE HUTS. EVEN AS THEIR HOMES
BURN, THEY SHOW NO EMOTION.

BASTARDS
AIN'T HUMAN.

THEN ONE, A MALE,
YOUNG ENOUGH TO
FIGHT, BREAKS FROM
THE FIRE.

HAH, YOU'RE DEAD
MEAT, CHARLIE.

DAMN!

THE INTERRUPTION IS ENOUGH.
THE GOOK VANISHES INTO THE
TREES. IT'S TRUE, THERE AINT
NO CIVILIANS IN THIS WAR.

ROSS LOOKS AT THE GIRL.
WHY IS SHE JABBERING
AT HIM? HE CAN'T UNDER-
STAND HER. NOTHING
ABOUT HER IS FAMILAR,
EXCEPT HER SEX.

CALMLY, HE SLAPS HER
ACROSS THE FACE,
REASSURED BY THE
SIGHT OF HER BLOOD.

HER EXPRESSION
IS UNREADABLE.

A HARD, COLD ANGER OF
INCOMPREHENSION STIRS
INSIDE HIM--HE IS SLIPPING
INTO ANOTHER WORLD.

BULLETS WHISPER MY NAME
OFF THROUGH THE CORN.

I KNEW IT WAS GOING TO
GET HEAVY, BUT THIS IS
WAY OUT OF ORDER.
MAGIC I CAN HANDLE --
BUT I DON'T LIKE GUNS.

ANYHOW, IT'S NOT
MY BLOODY WAR.

BUT, IN A WAY,
I KNOW IT IS.

Vietnam was everybody's war. A movie war, fought nightly on TV in front rooms around the world.

YOU'RE OUR
CHILDREN

LET HER
GO! WHAT ARE

NOW THE MISSING STARS OF
THAT MOVIE HAVE COME HOME

PLEASE, CRAIG,
I'M YOUR MOTHER.

BADDA
BADDABADDA

THOUGHT SHE HAD
A GRENADE. GODDAMN
GOOK BLATHER. CAN'T
UNDERSTAND THEM.

MOVE 'EM OUT,
ANDERS. LEAVE
ME THE RADIO. I'LL
CATCH YOU UP AT
THE LZ.

JEEZ,
LIEUTENANT.
YOU DIDN'T
HAFTA...

BUT WE BROUGHT
YOU BACK.

BUT WE BROUGHT
YOU BACK.

WE PRAYED
FOR YOU.

THERE'S SOMETHING
I GOTTA DO HERE.

LOOKS LIKE I'M THE
ONE THAT GOT AWAY.
I ONLY HAVE TO
WATCH.

SUDDENLY EXULTANT IN THE BLAZING NIGHT,
SCALES PEEL FROM HIS EYES. LIEUTENANT

HE HAS FOUND SOME LOST, WILD
PART OF HIMSELF--CAGED BY
HISTORY--WHICH NOW BENDS ITS
BARS AND STRETCHES ITS RAW
AND BLOODY FRAME.

HE COMMUNES
WITH THE GODS
OF WAR.

THE DARKNESS
ISN'T FRIGHTENING,
ONCE YOU
SURRENDER
TO IT.

IN HELL, AFTER
ALL, YOU SHOULD
EXPECT TO FIND
DEMONS.

THE WOMAN FIGHTS
HARD--BUT
HOPELESSLY.

THE DARKNESS
IS UNDENIABLE.

-- A HUNGER THAT
MUST BE SATISFIED --

IT IS A PASSION
THAT MUST BE
SPENT--

-- A POISON THAT
MUST BE DRAWN
BY A WARM, SOFT
POULTICE.

I SUPPOSE YOU COULD CALL IT VIETNAMERICA--THIS PLACE WHERE THE SMOKE BOILS LURIDLY INTO THE SKY, RISING TO MAUL THE THUNDERHEADS WITH ROUGH, OBSCENE HANDS.

YOU SHOULD DO SOMETHING, CONSTANTINE.

FRANK! STOP IT! DON'T DO THIS.

YOU'RE INSANE. IT'S ME, NANCY!

DOOOON'T!

NO WAY I CAN GO CHARGING INTO THEIR MOVE. IT'S TOO BLOODY DANGEROUS.

TOO MANY HOPES AND FEARS REFINED INTO ANGER. TOO MUCH DESPERATION DISTILLED INTO VIOLENCE.

BUT THERE'S NOTHING TO BE DONE. I'M SHUT OUT OF THIS THING.

AS RUPTURED REALITIES COLLAPSE AND FOLD TOGETHER INTO ONE, I DRAG A NEST OF STRAW AROUND ME--

YOU AIN'T A MAN--YOU'RE AN ANIMAL!

HE COWERS FROM THE WORLD'S LOUD CONDEMNATION. I WATCH HIM TREMBLE AS THE FEAR CREEPS BACK.

--AND LISTEN WHILE THUNDER BEATS A CLIMAX TO THIS CORRUPT PASSION PLAY.

THEN, VIOLENCE DISCHARGED, LIGHTNING PHOTOGRAPHS HIM--FLAT, WHITE, BREATHLESS AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME.



ROSS TRIES TO BURY HIMSELF IN FILTH.
FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE LANDING ZONE,
WHERE THE CHOPPERS ARE SLIPPED TO
PICK THE UNIT UP--

TERROR'S WILD PERCUSSION
BEATS OUT.

CARBINES RATTLE, MORTARS WOBBLE
THE JELLO NIGHT, AND A HEAVY
MACHINE-GUN STITCHES THE JUNGLE
TAPESTRY. THE UNIT HAS WALKED
INTO A HOT LZ.

CHARLIE'S OUT
THERE. LOTS OF HIM.

THE BOYS ARE GOOD AS
DEAD ALREADY-- ROSS
CAN'T HELP THEM.

IF THEY CATCH HIM AND
FIND THE GIRL-- WHAT
WILL THEY DO TO HIM?

BUT, WHEN YOU'RE AN
AMERICAN, THE CAVALRY
SOMETIMES COMES.

HE IMAGINES THE SLOPES, EVEN
NOW SLIPPING ROUND TREES,
LIKE SHADOWS-- LIKE ALLIGATORS,
SLIDING THROUGH THE RICE PADDY.

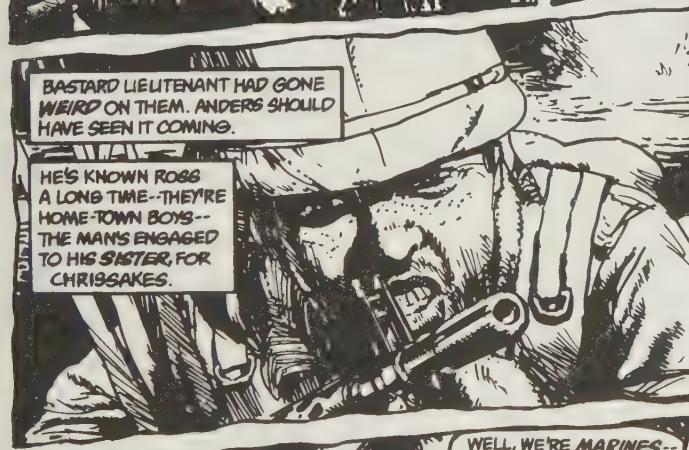
THIS IS BIRD-DOG ONE TO
CHICKEN-HAWK CONTROL.
WE HAVE A HOT LZ,
REFERENCE VECTOR ZERO
ONE LIMA TWO ECHO ALPHA.
REQUEST NAPALM. REPEAT,
REQUEST NAPALM.

THE WORDS ARE A SPELL TO
SUMMON FIRE FROM THE
SKY-- AMERICAN MAGIC.

WITHIN MINUTES, A WEDGE
OF SOUND RENDS THE DARK
CANVAS ABOVE HIM.

BUT, AS HE WAITS FOR
THE GASOLINE FLOWERS
TO BLOSSOM-- A SHADOW
FALLS ACROSS FRANK ROSS.





FRANK ROSS LOOKS UP INTO THE DESOLATE SKY AND FINDS HIMSELF ALONE IN THE EMPTY HEART OF AMERICA.

FEVER HAS WRUNG HIM DRY. EXHAUSTION BURDENS HIM WITH THE WEIGHT OF PLANETS.



HE IS LOST AND BLOOD Drips FROM HIS FINGERS.



IT'S HAPPENED AGAIN. THE UNIT HAD COME BACK--AND GONE AGAIN, WITHOUT HIM. HE STILL LIVES, WHILE THE WAR DEVOURS EVERYTHING AROUND.

GUILT AND DESPAIR WRENCH SOBS-- LIKE DEFORMED CHILDREN-- FROM HIS BELLY. NOT FOR HIM, THE FIRE AND PAIN.



HIS HELL IS HERE--ON EARTH.

WHY DON'T YOU TAKE ME TOO?

IT'S NO GOOD BAWLIN' ABOUT IT, SOLDIER.

YOU'D BETTER SHAPE UP. YOU'RE AN OFFICER!



PICK UP THAT WEAPON. GET WITH YOUR UNIT.

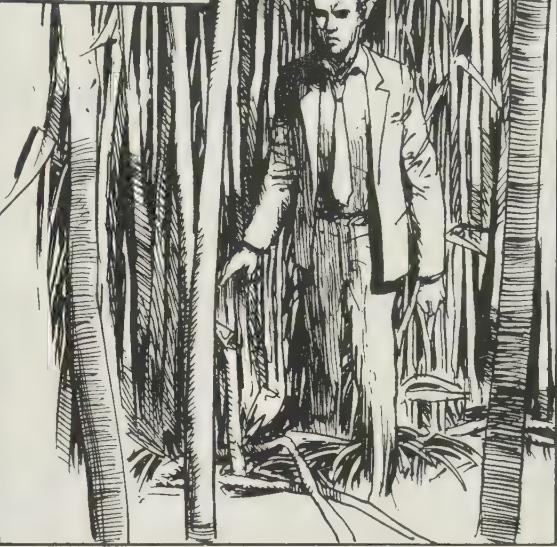
YOU'RE A MARINE. YOU'VE GOT TO FIGHT IF YOU WANT TO DIE.

ROSS VANISHES INTO THE CORN.

PERHAPS I SHOULDN'T'VE BLUTTED
IN -- BUT HE LOOKED LIKE HE
NEEDED A PROMPT.



I FOLLOW MORE
SLOWLY. THE ENDING'S
BOUND TO BE BAD--
BUT I CAN'T MISS IT.



TRAFFIC SOUNDS LIGHT ON THE INTERSTATE. JUST A
TRUCK IN THE DISTANCE -- OR IS IT A PLANE. HARD TO
TELL ABOVE THE WIND.



FROM UPON THE BRIDGE I CAN SEE
IT ALL START TO HAPPEN.

THE GHOST-MARINES, CROUCHED
ON THE FORECOURT. THE OLD FOLKS
-- HUDDLED, DAZED.



THE LIGHTS
OF THE TRUCK--



--AND ROSS,
STEPPING
FROM THE
CORN.

...I LOVE THE
MARINE...

BADDIA
BADDIA
BADDIA
BADDIA

SCREECH

...CORPS.



MARINES



POOR OLD SODS. NEVER HAD
A CHANCE. IT WAS AN ACCIDENT
WAITING TO HAPPEN--

--A HAMMER
WAITING TO
DROP.

SOMETHING TO DO WITH
THE PLACE--THE PEOPLE?

BITTERNESS AND BLIND
FAITH, WITH A SHOT OF
GUILT FOR A CATALYST?



A CANCER THAT'D BEEN GROWING FOR A LONG TIME? JUST WAITING FOR THE RESURRECTION CRUSADE TO KICK IT AWAKE--SPLIT THE TEMPORAL FABRIC AT A TENSION POINT, OR SOMETHING?

HOW THE HELL SHOULD I KNOW?

ONE THING IS SURE.
I'VE GOT TO GET ON
THOSE CRUSADERS'
CASE SOON.



CHRIST, WHAT A BLOODY AWFUL MESS!

VIETNAMERICA DROWNS IN FIRE.

BEFORE, I'D ONLY SEEN
THE WAR. NOW, I KNOW
HOW IT SMELLS.

IT SMELLS OF
GASOLINE.

I'M NOT INTERESTED IN THE BODY-COUNT. I LEAVE BEFORE THE FINAL CREDITS ROLL.

TWO HUNDRED MILES AWAY--IN DOGSHT, NEBRASKA, OR SOMEPLACE, LIKE ALL THE OTHER SOMEPLACES SCATTERED ACROSS THIS GIANT FARM--MY LIFT RUNS OUT.

I FEEL LIKE A VETERAN--JUST BACK FROM THE WAR ZONE--THRUST INTO A STRANGE, UNREAL WORLD.



THEN I SEE THE GUY BY THE CAR--
CATCH THE PAIN AND FEAR IN HIS EYES
AS HIS WIFE FUSSES THE KIDS
AND THE SHOPPING INSIDE.



I FLASH HIM A PEACE-SIGN--THEN
FEEL STUPID 'CAUSE HE'S GOT NO WAY
TO RETURN IT.



THANKS
FOR THE
RIDE,
PAL.

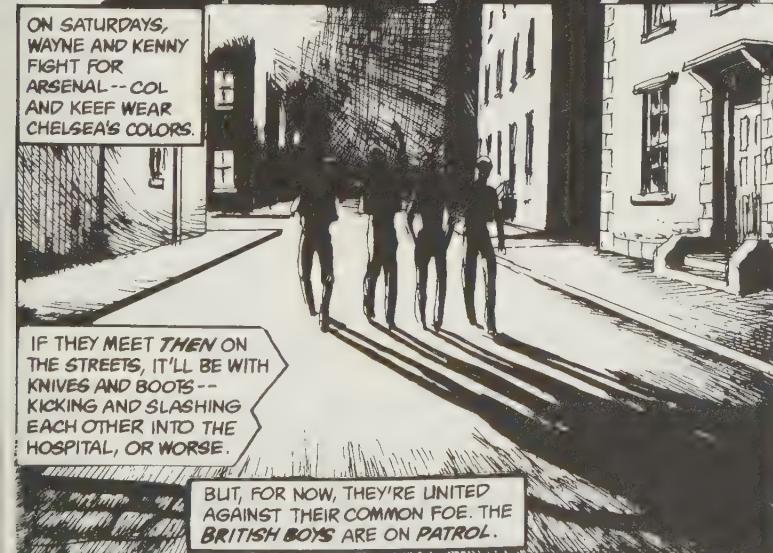


HUP, TWO, THREE, FOUR. I
LOVE THE MARINE CORPS.

I KNOW THIS. SOMETIME,
WHILE THE WAR VISITED
LIBERTY, I STOPPED BEING
AN OBSERVER AND BECAME
A WITNESS.









BRITISH BOYS
HATE QUEERS
WORST OF ALL.

QUEERS ARE FILTH-- HANGING
AROUND BOGS--



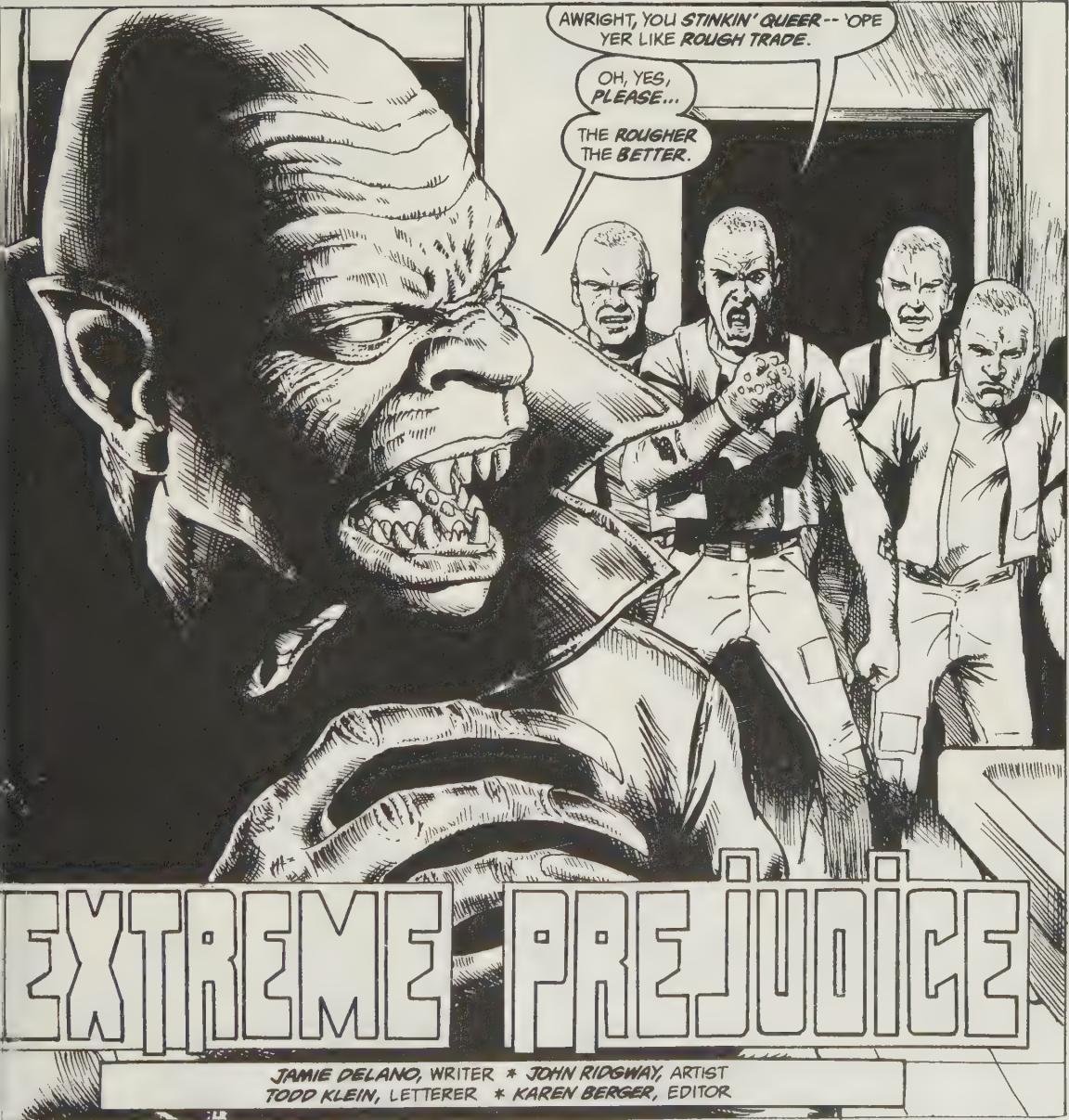
--MESSING AROUND
WITH KIDS--

--SPREADING DISEASES.

AWRIGHT, YOU STINKIN' QUEER-- 'OPE
YER LIKE ROUSH TRADE.

OH, YES,
PLEASE...

THE ROUGHER
THE BETTER.



JAMIE DELANO, WRITER * JOHN RIDGWAY, ARTIST
TODD KLEIN, LETTERER * KAREN BERGER, EDITOR

IT'S ROUGH ALL RIGHT.

I HATE VIOLENCE.

BUT YOU CAN'T PRETEND
IT ISN'T HAPPENING,
CAN YOU?

A SCARLET FURY
POUNDS THEM INTO
THE COLD PORCELAIN
WALLS.

A RED HURRICANE
SCATTERS THEM.

AFTER ALL, IT COULD BE A
MATE GETTING THE BATTERING,
LIKE RAY MONDE.

CONSCIOUSNESS RUNNING FROM
THE TILES OF HIS MIND--

KENNY REMEMBERS
THE TIME HE PUT
THE CANARY IN THE
CUISINART.

'ERE WE
GO THEN.

FIZZ

STREWTH! LOOKS LIKE
A BLOODY RALPH STEADMAN
DRAWING!



FIVE WENT IN.

NONE CAME OUT.

THEY EVEN SIGNED THEIR NAME TO IT. SAME BUNCH WHO HAD GEMMA--
LOOKS LIKE THE BRITISH BOYS WEREN'T AS LUCKY AS HER, THOUGH.

MUST'VE GONE
DOWN THERE.

HMM. NO BLOODY
CHANCE, NOT IN ME
GOOD COAT!

WHY IS IT ALWAYS
THE MOST PRIMITIVE,
STUPID ZONES THAT
ARE STRATEGICALLY
IMPORTANT.

NERGAL'S SUDDEN FLARE OF
ANGER HAD BADLY BROKEN THE
NEW RECRUITS.



EARTH IS SUCH A
PROVOKING PLACE.



BUT IMPROVISATION IS THE
ESSENCE OF GUERRILLA
WARFARE--THE WRECKAGE
CAN STILL BE PUT TO USE.

HE LIKES WORKING UNDERGROUND. COVERT ACTION IS
HIS CRAFT. SUBVERSION, DESTABILIZATION, DISINFORMATION--



--THE CORRUPTION OF
HEARTS AND MINDS.

UNSETTLING THE HUMAN HERD, TICKLING AWAKE THE
CANCERS OF DESPAIR, STAMPEDING THE MASS MIND
TO THE BRINK OF THE ABYSSAL VOID--



--THIS IS THE ART
OF DEMONS.

IN DEEP COVER NERGAL'S
DAMNATION ARMY GNAWS AT
THE ROOTS OF LIFE, WITH
HORROR.



IN THE PUB, THE HEAVY FLU OF SMOKE AND BEER SMOTHERS THE CLINGING REEK OF THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE.

LARGE BLOODY MARY, PLEASE, LUV. MIND IF I USE THE PHONE?

THIS DAMNATION ARMY KEEPS POKING UP HEADS, LIKE TOADSTOOLS. I CAN'T BE THE ONLY ONE WHO'S NOTICED.

C'MON, TONY, CALL YOURSELF A CRIME REPORTER?

CHARITY SINGER

RU 18
LAGER
I SAID, WHAT'S FLEET STREET'S WORD ON THE DAMNATION ARMY?

DO I HAVE TO GET HEAVY? I'VE GOT ENOUGH DIRT ON YOU TO KEEP THE NEWS OF THE SCREWS GOING FOR WEEKS.

THAT'S MORE LIKE IT.

IT'S WORSE THAN I THOUGHT. SEEMS LIKE THERE'RE LINKS RIGHT ACROSS THE BOARD. BIZARRE SUICIDES, RANDOM GROTESQUE ASSASSINATIONS, CANNIBALISM--

STRENGTH!

WE HATE TO GIVE OFFENCE SO PLEASE DON'T ASK FOR CREDIT

--MASS PUBLIC MURDER, WEIRD SEX ATTACKS.

ALL RIGHT, DON'T GET EXCITED. I GET THE PICTURE. HOW COME THE STORY'S NOT ALL OVER THE FRONT PAGE?

YEAH? THAT FIGURES. SEE YA--

THIS ISN'T ANARCHY, IT'S CHAOS.

'D' NOTICE, EH? GOVERNMENT WANTS IT ALL KEPT QUIET. SPECIAL BRANCH AND THE ANTI-TERRORIST SQUAD ON THE CASE?

THEY'RE ON THE WRONG TRACK THERE.

THE STREETS ARE LATE AND DARK
AS I MAKE MY WAY TO ZED'S PLACE.

RESURRECTION CRUSADERS?
DAMNATION ARMY? "SOMETHING IS
HAPPENING AND YOU DON'T KNOW
WHAT IT IS, DO YOU, MR. JONES?"

I'LL START ON THE DAMNATION ARMY
TOMORROW--BUT TONIGHT I JUST
WANT TO RELAX.

THE HOLLOW ECHOES OF MY
FOOTSTEPS HAUNT ME TO HER
DOOR.

I'VE LEFT IT TOO LATE TO PLAN.
THE FIRST MOVES HAVE ALL BEEN
MADE--I'LL JUST HAVE TO WING IT.

WE NEED
YOU, MARY.

DAMN! SHE'S
GOT COM-
PANY.

YOU SHOULDN'T
HAVE RUN
AWAY.

TIME GROWS
SHORT NOW.

YOU NEED TO
PREPARE.

DON'T CROWD ME. I NEED
THIS TIME ON MY OWN. I'LL
COME WHEN I'M READY.

WE'RE WORRIED THAT
MAY NOT BE SOON
ENOUGH.

TONGUES OF
FIRE HAVE ORDERED
US TO BRING YOU.

THE FIRST
ONE OF YOU EVEN
TOUCHES ME! I'LL FIND
HIMSELF A CANDIDATE
FOR INSTANT MARTYR-
DOM--BACK OFF!

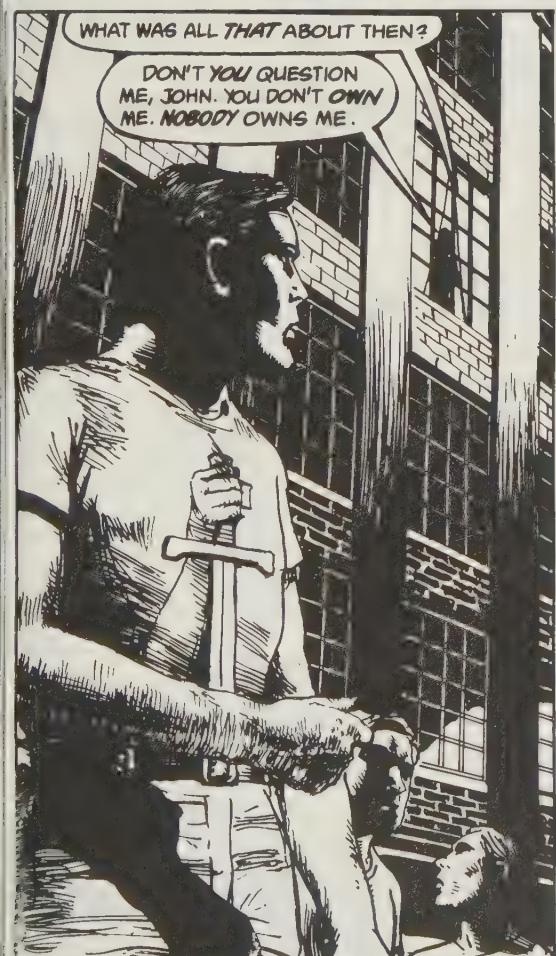
BOGART IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE ROLES.

HELLO, BOYS. THINK YOU
MUST BE IN THE WRONG PLACE.
THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY'S
NEXT DOOR.

OUT!

THAT'S THE WAY. ONWARD,
CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS.

WE'LL
SPEAK AGAIN--
MARY.



NERGAL SURVEYS HIS SHOCK-TROOPS WITH PRIDE. HAND-PICKED AND NURTURED IN THE TRAINING-CAMPS OF HELL'S COLONIES-- EACH HAS THAT HARD BRIGHT SPARK OF MADNESS, WAITING TO BE KINDED INTO CHAOS' FIRE.

THESE ARE SPECIALIST EXPLOSIVES--SMART BOMBS TO BE PLANTED AT THE CHOSEN TENSION POINTS OF HUMANITY.

DEFTLY, HE FILTERS THE BRIGHTEST RUBY-GEMS OF HATE-- DRAWS OUT THE GORGEOUS BRAIDED ROPES OF FEAR.

KEEN TALONS FILLET THE SMALL BLACK SACS OF BIGOTRY FROM THE DRAB HUMAN CLAY-- SQUASHING A FEW STUNTED BUDS OF LOVE.

THEN HE RE-SCULPTURES FLESH AND BONE--TWISTING AND CONTOVERTING IT TO SUIT A DEMON'S PURPOSE.

OF COURSE, NERGAL COULD KILL THE MARY WITH A GLANCE--

--BUT HOW MUCH FUNNIER AND MORE GLORIOUSLY GROTESQUE, TO DO IT WITH THIS HELL-BENT THING.

ENOUGH OF THEM
WILL BRING THAT
STRUCTURE SCREAMING
TO THE PIT.

THEY'RE HUNGRY-- SEE THEIR NOSTRILS
FLARE AS THE CLOTTED SOULS OF THE
RECRUITS DRIBBLE THROUGH HIS FINGERS
INTO THE DRAINS OF HELL.

THESE POTENT ESSENCES
HE HOLDS BACK. THEY
ARE THE POWER THAT
WILL DRIVE HIS RAW
ASSASSIN.

BUT FEW HUMANS
CAN LAUGH AT A
DEVIL'S MOCKERY.

HE HOPES THAT
CONSTANTINE
APPRECIATES
THE JOKE--

IN HELL, NERGAL ONCE
TORMENTED A MURDEROUS,
DECEITFUL SOUL--ONE
SUNDERLAND.

HE SPOKE A
SECRET LANGUAGE
TO DISGUISE HIS
CRIMES.

IN HIS WORLD,
ASSASSINATION WAS
COSMETICIZED.

TO KILL WAS TO
TERMINATE WITH
EXTREME PREJUDICE.

IN THIS CASE
THE BIZARRE
NOMENCLATURE
IS WONDERFULL
APT.

THE MOCKERY IS A PERFECT MALEVOLENT
WORK OF ART--BUT STUPID. TO GUIDE IT
TO THE SURFACE, NERGAL NEEDS A
CERTAIN AMBIENCE BELOW.

COME CLOSE
AND PLEASURE
ME.

THE COHORTS CAVORTS
INSTANTLY TO HIS
COMMAND.

AS THE MOCKERY WALKS OUT, THEY
WALLOW OVER HIM IN SLICK ECSTASY--
SOOTHING HIS CARCASS WITH
DEBAUCHERY.

--FREEING HIS
MIND TO INSPIRE
THE HUNT.

THEIR PALID DIGITS CRAWL THE
WASTELANDS OF HIS HIDE, LIKE
EXQUISITE SLICKLING SLUGS--



MY FINGERS TREAD THE TAUT TOPOGRAPHY OF FLESH--RUNNING HER TENSIONS MORE CLOSELY WITH MY OWN.

THAT'S GOOD.

SORRY I BLEW UP BEFORE. YOU WERE AN INNOCENT BYSTANDER.

HMM, DON'T KNOW ABOULT INNOCENT.

STOP TALKING NOW, THOUGH. TELL ME LATER.

LIKE SCIENTISTS, WE FALL TO OUR EXPERIMENT.

EXPLORING COMPLEX TACTILE FORMULAE.

TASTING THE ARCANE CHEMISTRY OF SEX.

SWEET MYSTERY...

...COLLIDING WORLDS...

...TOGETHER WE SYNTHESIZE A BRIEF UNIVERSE OF PEACE.

IT WAS NEVER
AS GOOD AS
THIS BEFORE
--NEVER AS
CLOSE, AS
PURE.

KENNY AND WAYNE
AND COL AND KEEF
WERE ALWAYS MATES--
BRITISH BOYS.

BUT, INSIDE THEIR UNIFORM OF
HATRED, EACH WAS ISOLATED BY
FEAR.

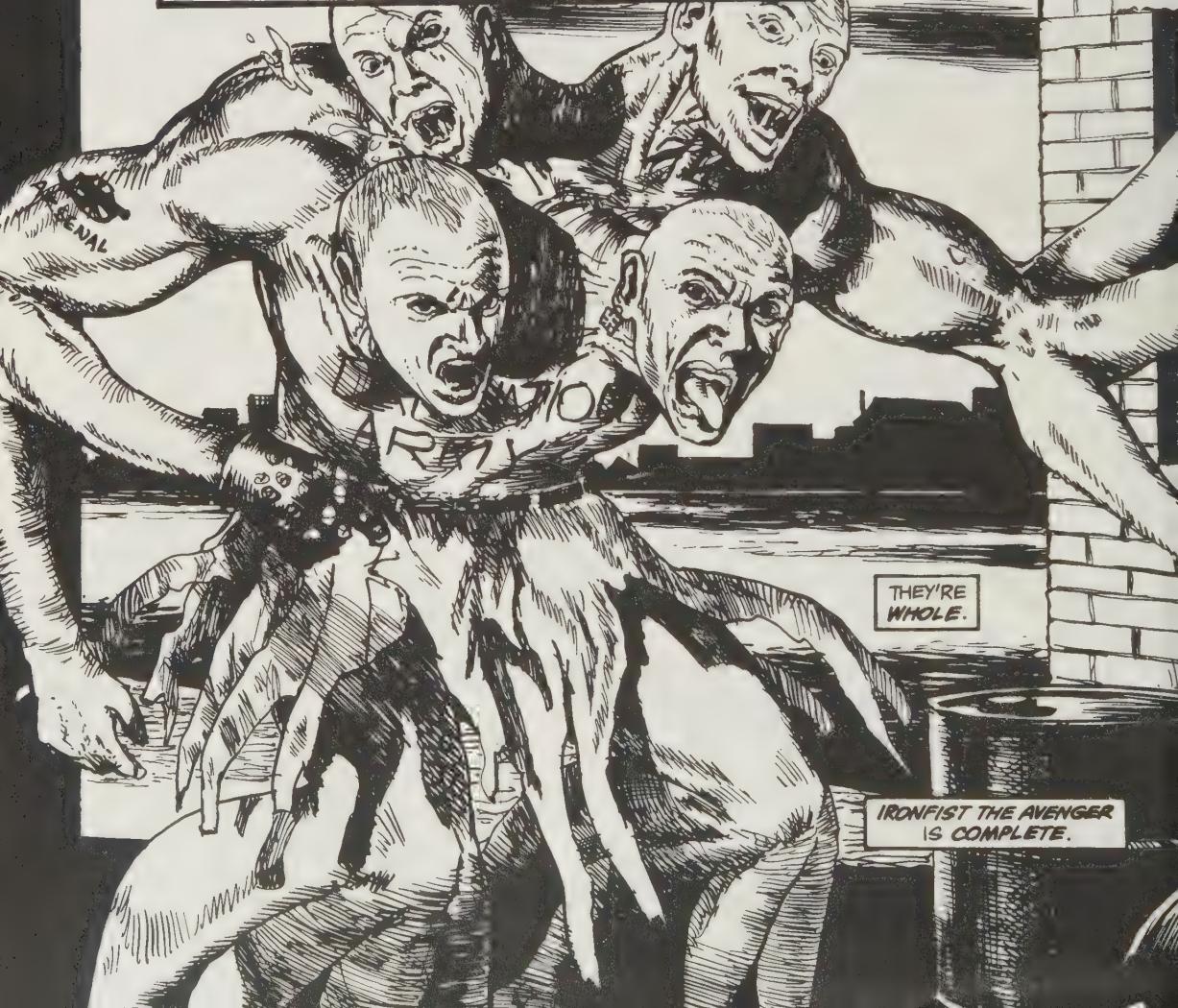


UNDERSTANDING LITTLE, SMASHING ALL THEY DID
NOT UNDERSTAND-- BOTH FUELED AND DEFEATED
BY THEIR CRASS IGNORANCE.

NOT NOW, THOUGH. NOW THEY'RE
BONDED-- BLOOD-BROTHERS IN ARMS.

NOTHING CAN COME BETWEEN
THEM. IT'S ALL FOR ONE AND
ONE FOR ALL.

NOW THAT THEY HAVE
A FLAG TO MARCH UNDER,
THEY'LL NEVER WALK ALONE.



THEY'RE
WHOLE.

IRONFIST THE AVENGER
IS COMPLETE.



HE FEELS GOOD -- FILLED
WITH A SENSE OF MISSION.



FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER,
HE HAS A JOB TO DO.



ONE MOMENT I'M IN WARM OBLIVION--
THE NEXT, SLEEP'S SCAMPERING OFF ON
NERVOUS LITTLE LEGS.

WHAT WOKE
ME? SOME
SOUND--A
CRY IN THE
NIGHT?

WHATEVER, A RESTLESSNESS, BORN
OF WORK UNDONE, PROPELS ME FROM
THE BED'S SOFT TRAP.

I'VE PUT
IT OFF
TOO LONG.

I DON'T LIKE SECRETS
I'M NOT A PART OF.

WHILE MY LOVER SLEEPS ON, I
PROWL THE COOL TERRITORY OF HER
HOME-- LOOKING FOR A CLOSET OF
OLD BONES.

AHA, JACKPOT.

BUT, BEFORE I
HAVE A CHANCE
TO ASSEMBLE
ANY SKELETONS--

--SOME NEBULOUS
QUALITY OF THE
NIGHT TOUCHES ME--

--MASSAGING GLANDS THAT TIGHT
MY CHEST--ERECT MY HAIR.

I KNOW THE
FEELING. IT'S
A SURE THING.

IF I'D BEEN ON THE BALL THESE LAST
FEW MONTHS, INSTEAD OF CHARGING
ABOUT IN THE STATES, I MIGHT HAVE AN
IDEA WHAT.

"SOMETHING
WICKED THIS
WAY COMES."



SOMEONE BREAKING IN DOWNSTAIRS.
COULD BE THOSE GOD'S WARRIOR
AGAIN -- BUT I DOUBT IT.

OH WELL, THE
BEST FORM OF
DEFENSE --

-- IS ATTACK.

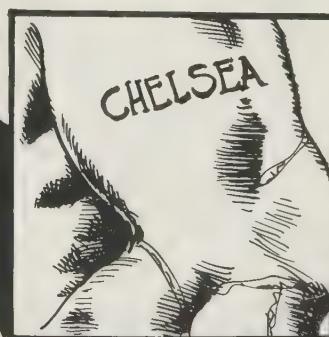
EEEEAAAHH

KRAZK





THINK FAST, JOHN. THEY'RE ONLY BLOODY FOOTBALL
Hooligans. They haven't got a full brain to
share between them.



ON SATURDAYS THEY
FIGHT THE FOOTBALL
WARS.

WAYNE AND KENNY
FOLLOW ARSENAL--

ARS-EN-AL!

CHEL-SEA!

--COL AND KEEF
TAKE TO THE
STREETS FOR
CHELSEA.

THESE ARE THEIR
TRUE COLORS --



--TRIBAL ALLEGIANCES,
OLD AND AUTOMATIC--
ROOTED IN THE PSYCHE.

RIVEN BY THEIR FORCE,
IRONFIST THE AVENGER
TURNS ITS HATRED
INWARD--

--LIMB TEARS
LIMB FROM
LIMB.

C'MON, KID, LET'S
GO WHILE THE GOINGS
GOOD.

STRENGTH, THE
ULTIMATE FASCIST
COMES APART AT THE
SEAMS--TALK ABOUT
DIVIDED
LOYALTIES.

GREAT
SPORT,
FOOTBALL
--EH?

NO POINT IN WAITING TO PICK UP
THE PIECES. TIMES LIKE THIS,
IT'S BEST TO RUN.



IT TAKES TWENTY FREEZING MINUTES
FOR CHAS TO PICK US UP.

WE TREMBLE TOGETHER--
CHEERED BY THE SCENT OF
STALE URINE.



RAY LOOKS AFTER ZED.
HE'S GOOD LIKE THAT.

SHE ALL RIGHT?

SLEEPING LIKE
A CHILD. I GAVE
HER TWO VALIUMS,
AND A MUG OF HOT
MILK--POOR LUV.

WHAT ABOUT YOU,
MATE? WHY THE
BOARDED WINDOWS?

YOU GOT
TROUBLE?

YES,
DEAR BOY.
I HAVE.



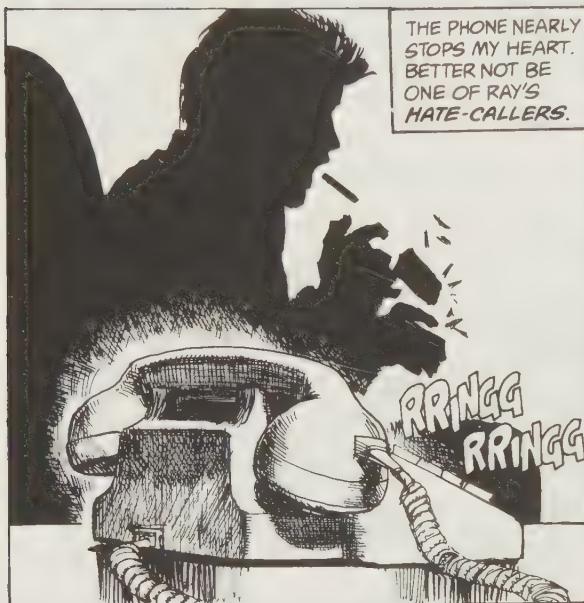
YES, JOHN.
I'M VERY MUCH
AFRAID THEY
ARE.



I SIT 'TIL DAWN SLIDES ITS GRAY
FINGERS BENEATH THE CURTAIN.



I CONSIDER THE RESURRECTION
CRUSADE AND THE DAMNATION
ARMY--TWO SIDES
TO THE SAME COIN.



CHAPTER THREE

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

ABOVE OUR HEADS, THE PROJECTOR
FILLETS STALE, THICK AIR--
SEARCHLIGHT BLADES DISSECTING
THE NIGHT FOR ZEPPELINS.



I PRESS MY SLOW INVESTIGATION.
FINGERS, LIKE SPIES COMING IN
FROM THE COLD, FIND RICH, WARM
BOUNTY SNUG AGAINST HER SKIN.



LIKE DRACULA, I KISS HER NECK
AND FEEL STIRRING DEEP INSIDE
HER, THE PRIVATE PASSION OF A
SECRET SOUL--THIS YOUNG
EXPLORER'S FINAL GOAL.



I MAKE MY MOVES. KIA-ORA CARTONS CRUNCH AND
CRACKLE ON THE GLUM-BOILED, POPCORNED FLOOR.
GOOD PROGRESS--BUT THIS VAMPIRIC LUST
DEMANDS STILL MORE.







I AM DEFEATED, UNMANNED.
DESIRE DIES--SHRIVELED
BY A SENSE OF SHAME.

I LOOK AWAY, UP TO THE
FLICKERING SCREEN WHERE
SHADOWS DANCE, LIKE...

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

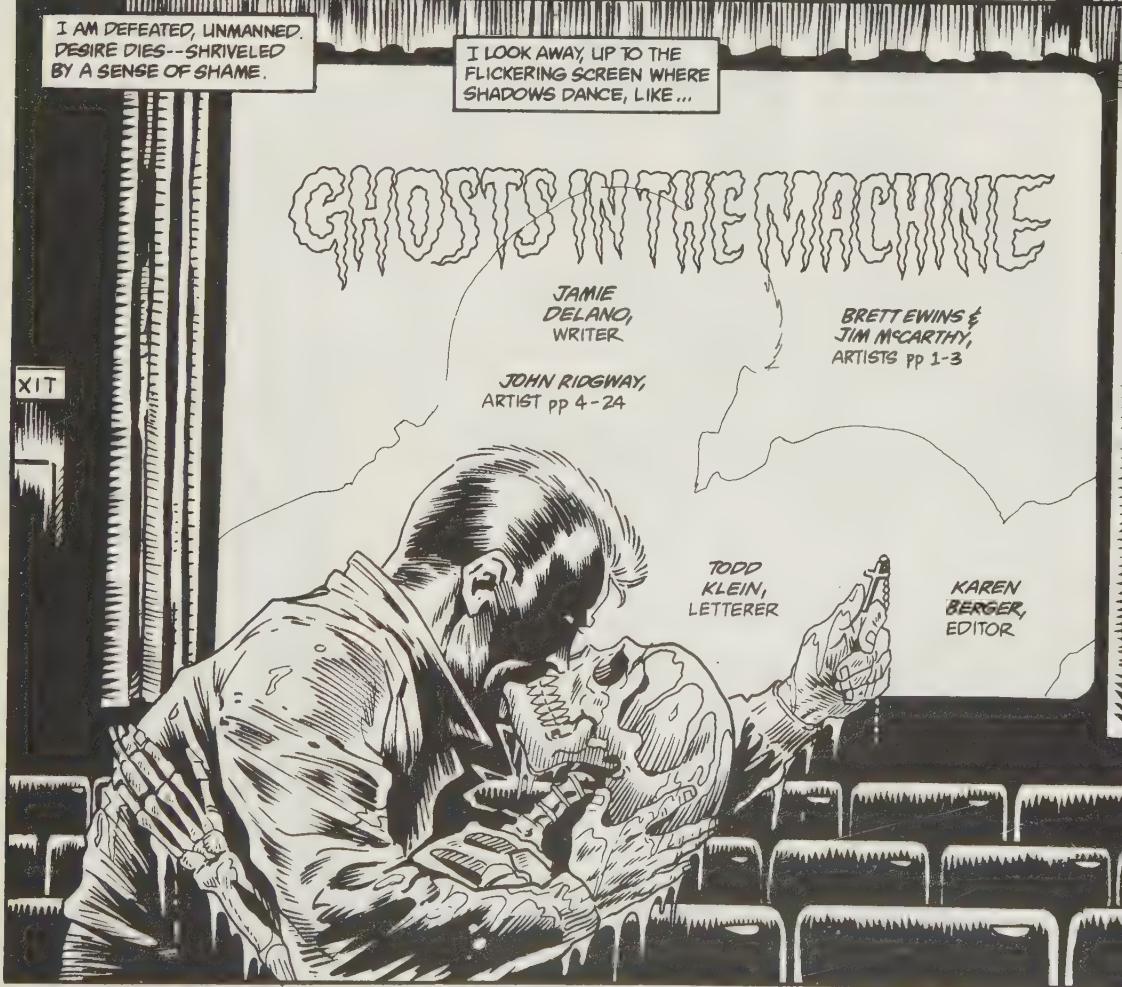
JAMIE
DELANO,
WRITER

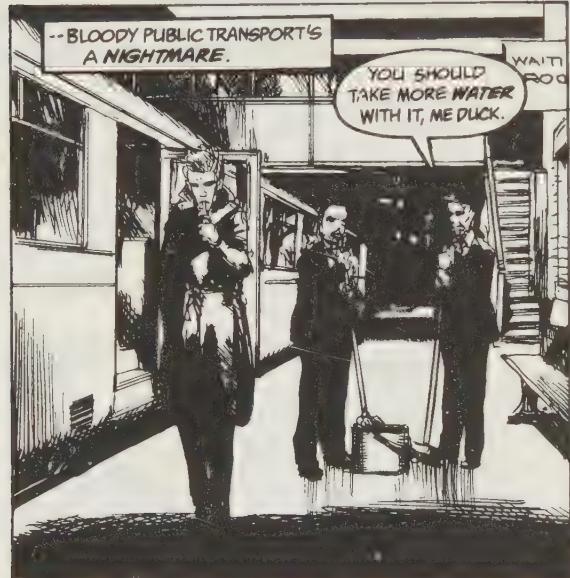
BRETT EWINS &
JIM McCARTHY,
ARTISTS PP 1-3

JOHN RIDGWAY,
ARTIST PP 4-24

TODD
KLEIN,
LETTERER

KAREN
BERGER,
EDITOR





IT'S NOT SO BAD, MAN. WORKING NIGHTS, THERE'S NOBODY AROUND TO BUG ME.

ONCE I DISCOVERED HOW FAR I COULD HACK INTO THE ELECTRONIC REALITY FROM THIS TERMINAL, I SOON SAW THE PARALLELS WITH MAGICAL PARADIGMS...

FAR OUT, MATE. WHAT DID YOU SNIFF OUT ON THE RESURRECTION CRUSADERS, THEN?

ANYWAY, HOW ELSE COULD I GET MY HANDS ON ALL THIS GORGEOUS HARDWARE?

IT'S WELL WEIRD, JOHN. WITH MY OUT-OF-THE-BODY STUFF AND A BIT OF JUDICIOUS CHEMOGNOSIS...

--I CAN GET MY CONSCIOUSNESS RIGHT INTO THE COMPUTER.

IT'S TYPICAL FUNDAMENTALIST MISSIONARY STUFF IN THE MAIN. A HEARTS AND MINDS OPERATION. HIGH-PROFILE FUND-RAISING...

I'D WORKED THAT MUCH OUT, MATE -- BUT THEY'VE GOT TO HAVE A SECRET.

WELL, I DID GET A WHIFF OF A SPLINTER GROUP. TONGUES OF FIRE, THEY CALL THEMSELVES...

THEY'RE THE KIDDIES.

IT WAS A BIT DOODY IN THEIR NECK OF THE WOODS-- THEY'VE GOT SOME HEAVY TECHNOLOGY.

I CAN MOVE IN THE FIFTH DIMENSION, MAN.

YEAH, I UNDERSTAND QUANTUM MAGIC, MATE. NOW, WHAT DID YOU GET ON THE BLEEDIN' CRUSADERS?

HE'S A GOOD BLOKE, RITCHIE--AND A BLOODY CLEVER MAGICIAN--BUT HE DOES RATTLE ON!









NOW LOOK, DEARIES. YOU'VE MADE A MISTAKE -- THIS GIRL'S NOT CALLED MARY...

DON'T GET INVOLVED, RAY.

SILENCE, VILE SODOMITE. DO YOU THINK A MAN DOES NOT RECOGNIZE HIS OWN DAUGHTER?

COME, GIRL, IT'S OVER. THE TIME GROWS NEAR NOW. YOU MUST BE ABOUT THE LORD'S WORK. IT IS YOUR DESTINY.

RAY, LEAVE IT.

NO! DON'T HURT HIM. I'LL COME WITH YOU.

STOP THEM! THEY'LL KILL HIM.

HE IS AN ABOMINATION IN THE EYES OF THE LORD. CORRUPT, UNNATURAL -- LOWER THAN A BEAST OF THE FIELD.

HE MUST BE PUNISHED.

UNNNNG!

AFTER THE FIRST COUPLE OF KICKS, YOU DON'T FEEL ANY PAIN -- JUST THINGS BREAKING INSIDE. BATTERED BY HOMOPHOBES. NEVER WOULD'VE HAPPENED IF SERGEANT BILL WERE HERE.

"YOU'D'VE SORTED THE BASTARDS OUT, WOULDN'T YOU, LUUV?"

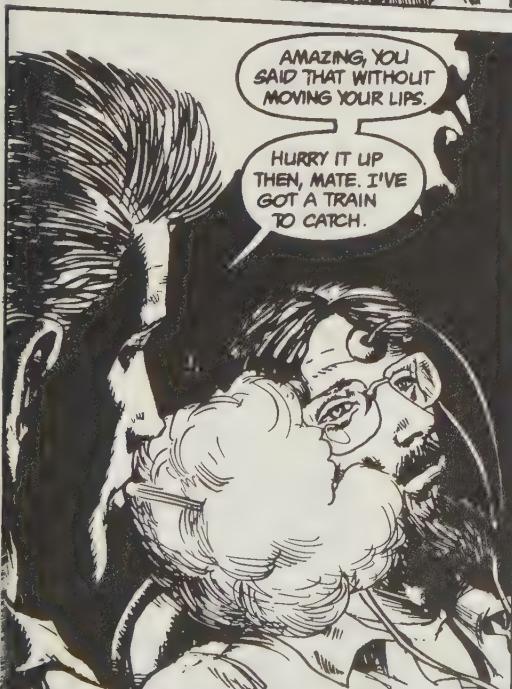
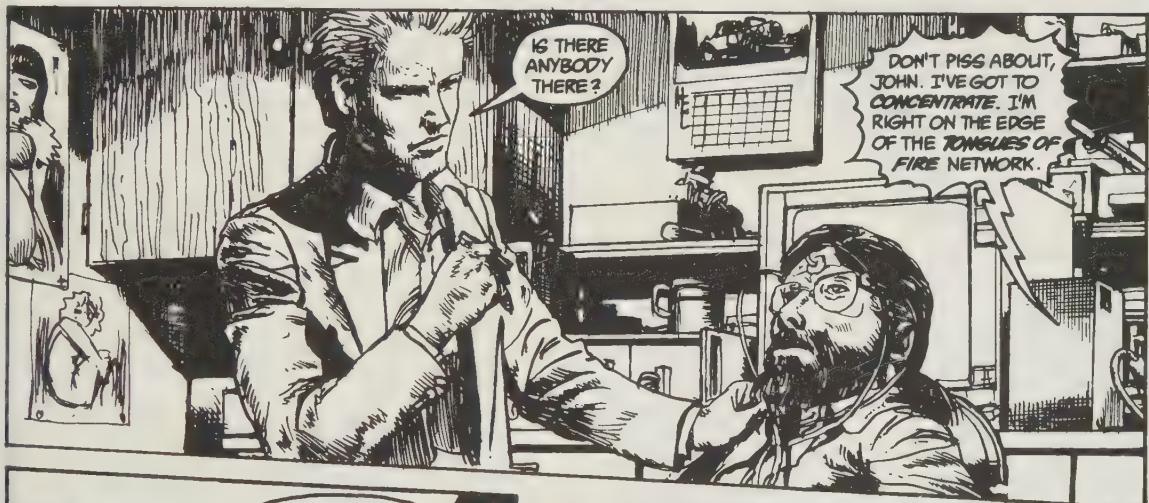
TEN MINUTES AND TWO QUID'S WORTH OF
LOOSE CHANGE LATER, I STILL HAVEN'T
GOT A CUP OF HOT COFFEE--



MACHINES. YOU EITHER UNDERSTAND
'EM, OR YOU HATE 'EM.



WELL, THE LIGHT SHOW'S IMPROVING.
RITCHIE MUST BE GETTING SOMEWHERE.
HOPE HE KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING.
HE WAS ALWAYS A BIT RECKLESS
IN THE OLD DAYS.





"HURRY IT UP," HE SAYS
THAT'S TYPICAL OF
BLOODY CONSTANTINE.

HE SHOULD TRY FOLLOWING
A TEN-DOLLAR PYRAMID OF
PRAYER DONATION FROM
LIBERTY, IOWA --

--THROUGH TWENTY DIFFERENT
COMPUTER SYSTEMS --

--TO AN ACCOUNT IN BARCLAY'S
BANK, GLASTONBURY, ENGLAND.

AND THAT WAS THE EASY
PART. THIS TONGUES OF
FIRE SYSTEM IS LIKE NOTHING
I'VE EVER GOT INTO BEFORE.



"HURRY IT UP" -- HUH, ME
COULDN'T EVEN BEGIN TO
COMPREHEND THE ECSTATIC
TERROR, THE PURE JOY OF
TOTAL FREEDOM TO MOVE--
POWERED ONLY BY THE
ENGINE OF WILL--THROUGH
THIS INTERMINABLY
AWESOME BEAUTY.

IT'S DEFINITELY
THE BEST
BUZZ YET.



NOT THAT JOHN WOULD APPRECIATE THAT. HE'S TOO DAMN TIGHT-ASSED THESE DAYS -- NEVER BEEN THE SAME SINCE NEWCASTLE.

STILL, I SUPPOSE THAT CHANGED US ALL. WE ALL WENT A BIT CRAZY AFTER NEWCASTLE.

WONDER WHY HE'S SO INTERESTED IN THESE RESURRECTION CRUSADERS?

THERE HAS TO BE A WOMAN INVOLVED. JOHN'D GO TO HELL AND BACK IF HE THOUGHT THERE WAS SOME INTERESTING SEX IN IT.

NOW, WHAT'S THIS -- SOME KIND OF INTERFACE?

BLOODY STRANGE ONE, THOUGH. THEY CERTAINLY DON'T WANT ANY UNAUTHORIZED ACCESS TO THIS SYSTEM. TALK ABOUT DEFENSES -- THIS IS A POSITIVE MINEFIELD OF BOOBY-TRAPPED LOGIC-BOMBS.

A WRONG MOVE HERE COULD BE FATAAAAAL...

RITCHIE,
ARE YOU ALL
RIGHT?

YOU'D
BETTER COME
OUT NOW, MATE.
THIS MACHINE
LOOKS
RESTLESS.

SYNAPSES FLASH AND POP,
LIKE FLASHBULB SUPERNOVAE
AS THE PARTICULAR PASSION
OF MY BEING IS CAUGHT UP IN
A SUB-ATOMIC SLAM-DANCE.

CONSCIOUSNESS IS SNATCHED BY
ELECTRON RIP-TIDES AND THINLY SPREAD
THROUGH INFINITE SPATIAL BLACK,
LEAVING THOUGHTS - RARE SLEEPING
ISLANDS - SEPARATED BY OCEANIC
ETERNITIES.

I'M STRETCHED, ELASTIC LIFE
WOUND IN A DOUBLE HELIX ROUND
THE UNIVERSAL POLE --

--A STRING OF NEURONS
IN THE COSMIC BRAIN--

-- RESONANT, MY BEING
TUNED TO EVERYTHING.

RITCHIE...?

NOW, CONTRACTION CATAULPTS MY SOUL
INTO A NEW, TRIUMPHANT BIRTH. RHAPSODIC,
BATHED IN PERFECT GRACE, I SAIL FOR EONS...

--BLESSED, IN BEATIC
TRANQUILITY, ALIVE IN A
UNIVERSE OF GLORY--

--AT PLAY WITH ANGELS
ABOVE THIS FIERCE AND
HOLY SUN.

BUT, TRANSIENT AS ELEMENTAL
THOUGHT, MY VOYAGE LASTS
BUT BRIEF MILLENNIA.

SWEEEPING ON A HIGH,
WIDE SPIRAL TURN, MY
SHIP OF RAPTURE
FOUNDEERS, GROUNDED
ON MORTALITY'S REEF.

PARTICLES REASSEMBLE
AND MEMORIES COALESCCE
AROUND MY SWELLING
SENSE OF SELF.

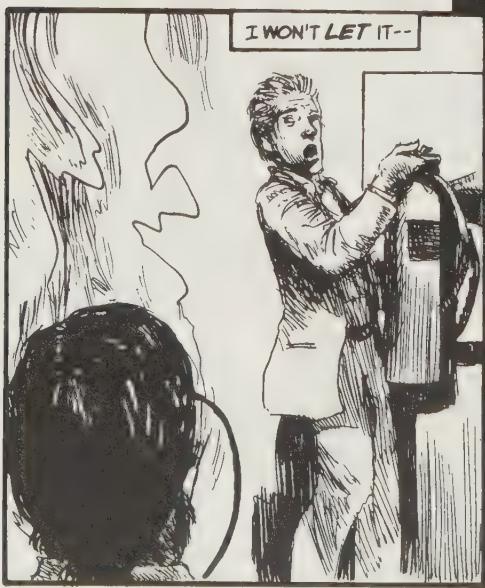
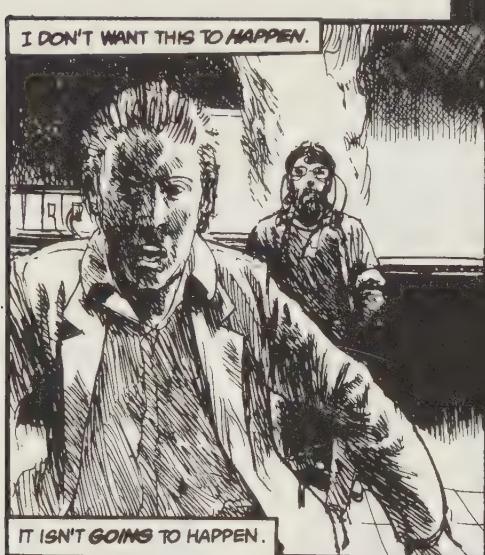
I MUST START THE
LONG RETURN TO DULL
CORPOREALITY AND
RECLAIM MY BODY'S
TAWDRY CLAY.

C'MON,
MATE, SPEAK
TO ME.

RITCHIE...?

AAAH!

JESUS!
HE'S BURNING
UP.



IT'S FAR TOO HOT FOR THE EXTINGUISHER--CAN'T EVEN GET NEAR.

S.H.C.--SPONTANEOUS HUMAN COMBUSTION--THERE'VE BEEN SOME CASES IN THE "FORTEAN TIMES." LAST TIME I SAW IT WAS IN BARON WINTERS' HOUSE.

IT'S HORRIBLE.

IN LESS THAN ONE CRACKLING, SCORCHING MINUTE, RITCHIE IS REDUCED TO CHARCOAL.

THE ACRID SMELL OF THE CHARNEL HOUSE PAINTS MY SENSES WITH NAUSEA--

BUT I HAVE TO HAVE A LOOK.

WHAT'S LEFT IS BRITTLE--BUT GREASY TO THE TOUCH.

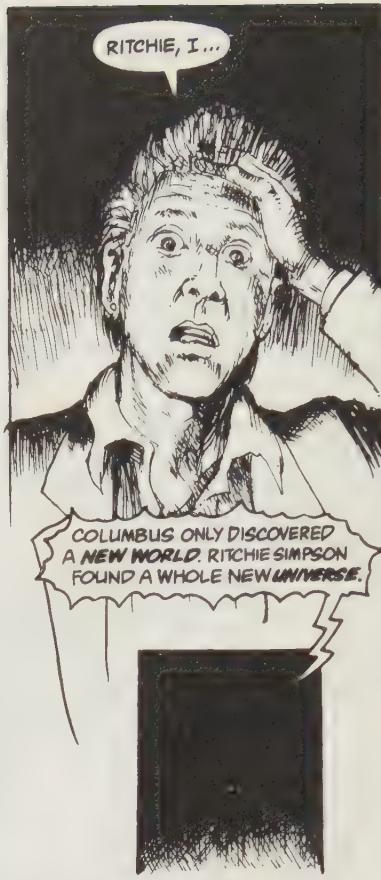
THE SHOCK OF HEARING HIS VOICE IS TEMPORARY--THE SINKING FEELING THAT FOLLOWS REALIZATION OF THE IMPLICATIONS, LESS SO.

JOHN.

WHA!

YOU THERE, JOHN? LISTEN, I HAD A BIT OF A CLOSE CALL, BUT I'M OK.

I'M ON MY WAY BACK.



I FOUND THE TONGUES
OF FIRE TERMINAL, JOHN.
IT'S SOMEWHERE IN
GLASTONBURY--SHOULDN'T
BE TOO HARD TO TRACK
DOWN.

WHAT AM I GOING TO
DO? I CAN'T LET HIM GET
BACK INTO HIS BODY. HE
WOULDN'T THANK ME,
WOULD HE?

THEY'VE HOOKED INTO SOME
TREMENDOUS SOURCE OF
PRIMAL ENERGY. I GOT
SLICKED INTO IT. IT'S LIKE...

GOOD,
MATE,
GOOD.

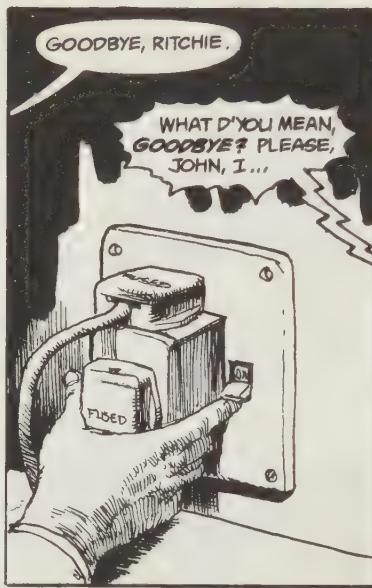
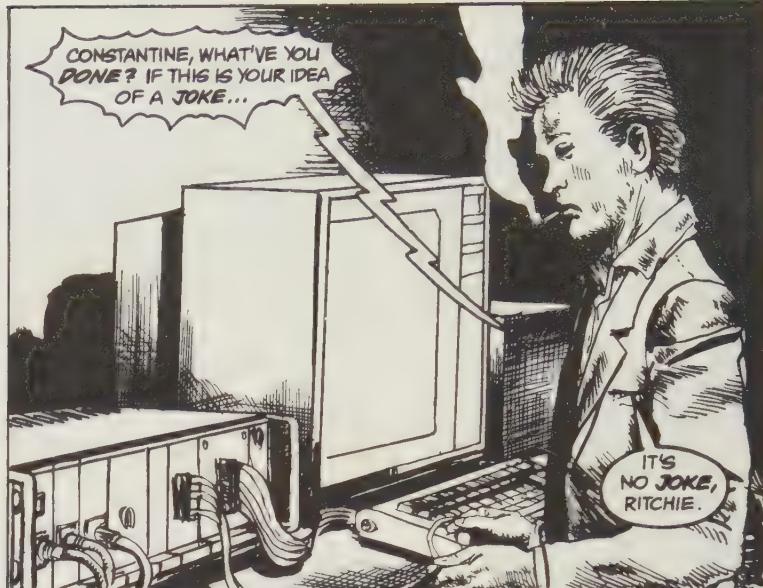
YEAH, WHAT'S
IT LIKE, MATE?

IT'S LIKE NIRVANA.

HOW DO YOU TELL SOMEONE THAT
HIS BODY'S BURNED TO THE
GROUND WHILE HE WAS OUT?

I MEAN, HE'S NOT GOING
TO BE ABLE TO CLAIM OFF
HIS INSURANCE, IS HE?





THE DAWN TRAIN LURCHES ME BACK TOWARD LONDON ROLLING A SICK, MILLSTONE HEADACHE AROUND THE BOWL OF MY SKULL.

MY HEART TWITCHES LIKE A DYING BEAST, CRAWLED INTO THE RANK BURROW OF MY CHEST TO BREATHE ITS LAST.

I'M COLD, CHILLED TO THE MARROW.

I DAREN'T EVEN SHUT MY EYES FOR FEAR OF SLEEP AND DREAMS.

I FEEL LIKE AN OLD SOLDIER, ATTENDING, ONE BY ONE, THE FUNERALS OF WAR COMRADES.

ITCHIE WAS THE LAST OF THE NEWCASTLE TEAM.

BENJAMIN GOT IT FIRST-- FROM THE INVINCIBLE, AND ME.

THEN GARY LESTER-- FROM MNEMOTHY, AND ME.

CHRIST, IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS-- WILL I NEVER STOP PAYING FOR THAT DEBACLE?

NOW RITCHIE'S INCINERATED BY THE TONGUES OF FIRE-- AND ME.





LIKE A COLD SPECULUM, A
SUDDEN NAUSEA TOUCHES
HER GLUT.

SHE FEELS HIM FALLING--
FALLING INTO BLACK.

SHE CONCENTRATES HER
WILL TO SEND HIM STRENGTH.
IF SHE LOSES JOHN, SHE
MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP.

SHE NEEDS HIM--NEEDS
A FRIEND TO HELP HER
CHEAT HER DESTINY.

SHE SHOULD HAVE TOLD
HIM MORE ABOUT THE
DANGERS, NOT LET HER
TONGUE BE CURBED BY
SHAME.

TOO LATE NOW,
THOUGH. NOW SHE
CAN ONLY WAIT--
AND HOPE.

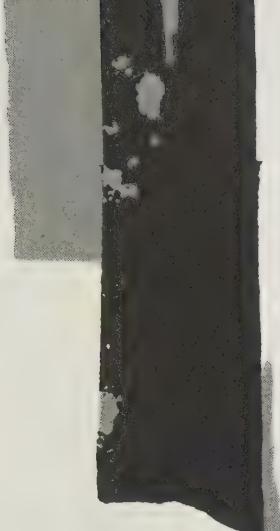


CAN WE STILL
USE HER--NOW THAT
THE SANCTITY OF HER
PHYSICAL TEMPLE HAS
BEEN VIOLATED BY
THAT CORRUPT
CONJURER?

VIRGINITY WOULD HAVE BEEN
PREFERABLE--BUT MENTAL
ALIGNMENT IS MORE IMPORTANT.

WE'LL NEVER FIND A BETTER
PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE. I SUGGEST
INTENSIVE RE-EDUCATION--BEGINNING
TOMORROW--IN GLASTONBURY.

NEXT: "INTENSIVE CARE"



CHAPTER FOUR

INTENSIVE CARE

GLASTONBURY--A PLACE BLESSED
IN MYTH AND LEGEND.

IN THIS FERTILE EARTH--NOW
DRAPED IN CHILLY, VIRGIN SHEETS--
IT IS SAID JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA
ONCE PLANTED HIS STAFF AND
WATCHED IT SPROUT INTO A
SACRED TREE.

NOW, A NEW CRUSADER CASTLE
STANDS SENTINEL OVER THIS
ENGLISH HOLY LAND.

RESURRECTION CRUSADE
RETREAT AND SANCTUARY
- NO ADMITTANCE -

FROM HERE, GOD'S WARRIORS
RIDE OUT TO DO THEIR MASTER'S
WORK.

HOME AGAIN--HER GREAT
ADVENTURE FINISHED, AS IF
SHE'D NEVER BEEN AWAY.

THE BRIEF FLOWER
OF FREEDOM, WHOSE
NECTAR HAD SO EXCITED
HER TONGUE, IS FADED
NOW, CRUMBLING INTO
DUST.

WAS IT REAL--OR JUST A DREAM?

WAS THERE EVER A WOMAN
CALLED ZED, WHO LIVED IN
BABYLON, WHO CHOSE THE
PATHS SHE WISHED TO WALK--

-- WHO CHEATED DESTINY
FOR A WHILE, AND HAD
A MAN, CALLED JOHN?

OR WAS THERE EVER ONLY THIS
GIRL--THIS CHILD--THIS
DAUGHTER?

A FRAIL HANDMAIDEN
TO THE LORD--LONELY
AND AFRAID.

ONCE MORE THEY NAME HER MARY.

THEY TAKE HER BY THE HANDS, LEADING HER FROM TEMPTATION--

CLIMATE KILLER
CLAIMS THIRTEEN

DAILY
PRESS
KILLING
STACK

GULF
JIHAD
MINENT

STAR
GIRLS
CATHEDRAL
FIRE BOMB

FOR YEA, THE WORLD
DRAWS NEAR ITS END--
DAILY DRAGGED DEEPER
INTO THE MORASS
OF HELL.



WAG
OR
THE

NO
CENSORSHIP

A

AGENTS OF SATAN
WALK FREELY AMONGST
THE PEOPLE MOCKING THE
WORKS OF GOD,
STRANGLING INNOCENCE
IN ITS CRADLE AND
SPREADING VILE
CONTAGION.

MEN STRUGGLE AGAINST
MEN -- FOLLOWING FALSE
PROPHETS IN BAYING PACKS,
LIKE VICIOUS SHEEP
MUTATED BY HELL'S
VITRIOL.

-- AND SUBMERGE HER
IN STILL WATERS,
DISSOLVING MEMORY,
ANXIETY AND FEAR.

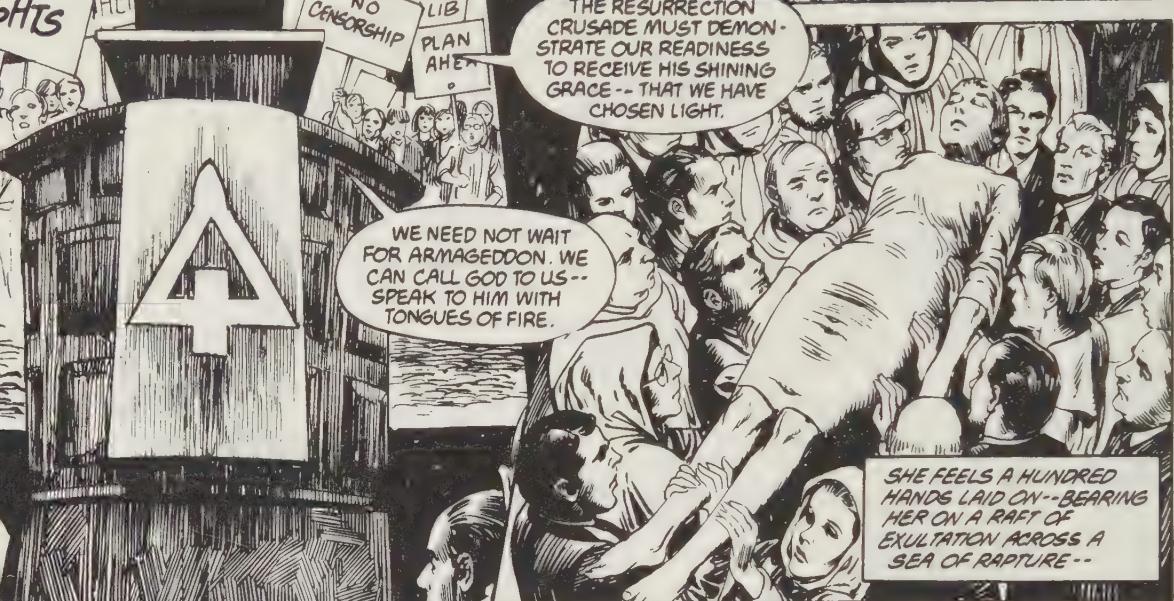
AT LEAST IN GLASTONBURY
SHE DOESN'T HAVE TO
CHOOSE.

BLESS THIS PRODIGAL
DAUGHTER WHO HAS
RETURNED TO OUR FOLD.
LEND STRENGTH TO HER
BODY THROUGH PRAYER,
SO THAT SHE MAY SERVE
HEAVEN MOST MIGHTILY.

HERE, IT'S SHE
WHO'S CHOSEN.

HALLELUJAH!
HALLELUJAH!





THEY TAKE
HER DOWN.

IN THIS TEMPLE OF
TECHNOLOGY THE LAST
PROTESTS OF FREE
WILL ARE SILENCED.

THE RE-INDOCTRINA-
TION IS COMPLETE?
SHE'S MENTALLY
PREPARED NOW?

YES.

GOOD. THE FINAL ADJUSTMENTS
ARE ALL SURGICAL.

GO NOW, AND
LEAVE HER TO
OUR...

DOWN TO THE
SANCTUM OF THE
TONGUES OF FIRE.

JAMIE DELANO • JOHN RIDGWAY & ALFREDO
ARTISTS
WRITER COSTANZA • KAREN BERGER
LETTERER EDITOR

SILENCE.

DARKNESS GRAYED
BY SICK LIGHT.

FEAR.

INSIDE ME, NAUSEA QUIVERS--
SOLID AND BLACK.

WHO AM I?
WHERE AM I?

K-DOK K-DAK K-DOK K-DAK K-DOK SKUFF SK-DOK

OUT OF THE SILENCE
FOOTSTEPS WALK--ECHOING
AS IF THEY PACED A TOMB,
OR PRISON.

SEWTANG
CHANG
SCHTUNNG

MY BODY ACHES
AND TREMBLES.

WHY? WHY AM I HERE?

WHY AM I AFRAID
OF THE LIGHT?

ALL
RIGHT,
CONSTANTINE,
YOU FILTHY
LITTLE
PERVERT.
GET ON
YOUR
BLEEDIN'
FEET!

OUT IN THE LIGHT, THEY
CAN ALL SEE ME.



GIVE
THE BASTARD
HELL!

MAKE HIM
SING, BOYS. IT'LL
BE A LULLABY.

ANGER STABS
FROM THE SHADOWS
LIKE HOMEMADE
KNIVES.

A POISON SPRING
OF GUILT WELLS
UP. BUT WHAT'S
MY CRIME?

THIS IS WHERE YOU
GET YOURS, ANIMAL.
AND IT'S GOING TO
BE A PLEASURE.



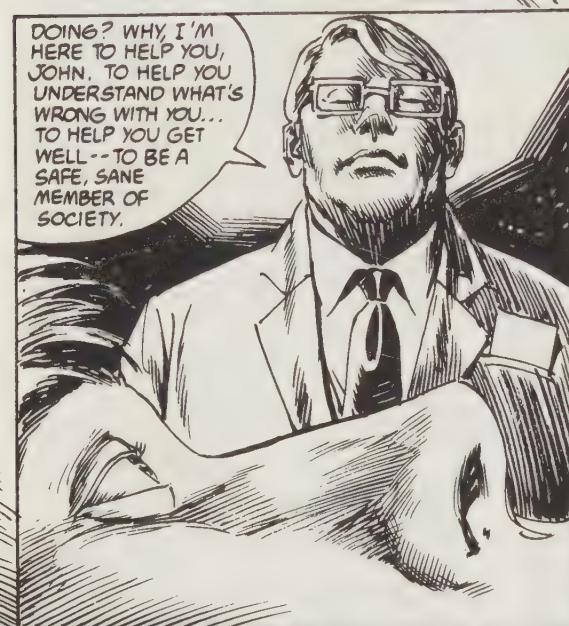
HATRED BATTERS ME WITH RUBBER
HOSE, AND LOATHING CHILLS MY
FLESH LIKE A BATH OF ICE.



WE CAN'T DO
TO YOU WHAT
YOU DID TO HER.
WE'RE HUMAN.

BUT WE CAN SURE AS
HELL MAKE YOU
SUFFER.





SHE WAS POSSESSED BY DEMONS.
WE TRIED TO HELP HER BUT IT
ALL FOULED UP.

HMM... KILLED
IS AN UNDER-
STATEMENT,
I THINK.

CHRIST, MAN. I
TRIED! I TRIED TO
HOLD IT. BUT WITH
THE CIRCLE BROKEN,
THERE WAS NO
CHANCE.

GARY LESTER LOST
HIS BOTTLE, DIDN'T HE?
THEN THE THING... THEN
THE THING KILLED HER.

OH DEAR, JOHN.
I'D HOPED THE
ELECTRIC SHOCK
THERAPY WOULD
SHATTER THOSE
PARANOID DE-
LUSIONS. IT'S
VITAL THAT YOU
FACE THE "EVIL"
IN YOUR SOUL.
WE'LL HAVE TO
INCREASE THE
VOLTAGE TWO
POINTS.

AND THIS TIME,
JOHN, PLEASE
TRY TO SEE THE
LIGHT.

NO, WAIT, HUNTOON,
YOU BASTARD,
YOU'RE ENJOYING
THIS.







WHERE, THOUGH?
I'M NOT IN MY
BED, NOR ZED'S.



IT'S THE
SMELL THAT
GIVES THE
GAME AWAY--
ANTISEPTIC,
SICKNESS,
DEATH.



--AND STORMED
OUT, FORGETTING
THAT WE WERE
RATTLING AT SIXTY
MILES AN HOUR
THROUGH THE
NIGHT.

THEN PAIN--
A DEEP, MOSSY,
WOODY SMELL--
AND ALL WAS
BLACK.



JESUS, WHAT A BLOODY
STUPID BERK.

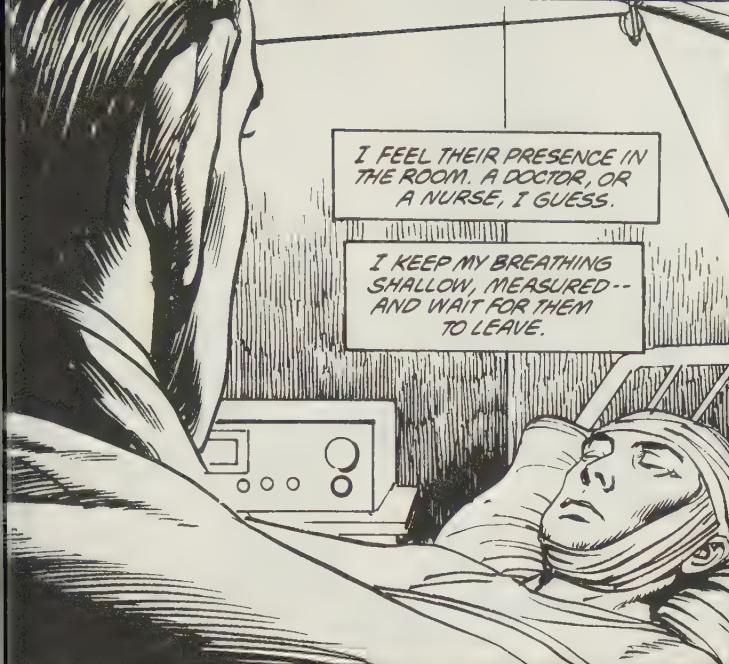
EMBARRASSMENT WARMS
MY FACE. SMALL WONDER
I'M IN INTENSIVE CARE. I
SHOULD COUNT MYSELF
LUCKY I DIDN'T WAKE UP
IN THE MORGUE.

I'D BETTER SLOW DOWN-- START
USING WHATEVER BRAINS ARE
LEFT UNSCRAMBLED.

BUT FIRST I NEED
TO KNOW HOW
BADLY I'VE MANGLED
THIS FRAIL, MORTAL
FORM.







I FEEL THEIR PRESENCE IN
THE ROOM. A DOCTOR, OR
A NURSE, I GUESS.

I KEEP MY BREATHING
SHALLOW, MEASURED--
AND WAIT FOR THEM
TO LEAVE.



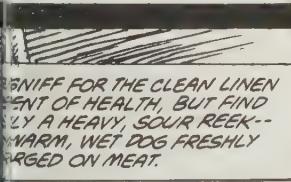
BUT, BENEATH MY TONGUE, A HARD,
SMOOTH, NERVOUS EGG IS GROWING--
AS IF FEAR PECKED WITH A TINY BEAK
TO BREAK THROUGH ITS SHELL AND
FILL MY MOUTH.



I GAG ON RANK
FEATHERS, CHOKING
OUT THE SQUAWKING
HATCHLING.



THEN SOMETHING TOUCHES ME--
DAMP AND COLD. A TOWEL? A SPONGE
IN SOME KIND NURSE'S HAND?



THE VOICE FLOWS,
LIKE SEWAGE,
INTO MY EAR.

CONSTANTINE. JOHN
CONSTANTINE.



THE DAMP TOUCH
CIRCLES MY FACE,
THEN MOISTENS
AND PARTS MY
LIPS--

-- ITS SUDDEN ELECTRIC
CONTACT WITH MY TONGUE
SHOCKING MY EYES
WIDE OPEN.

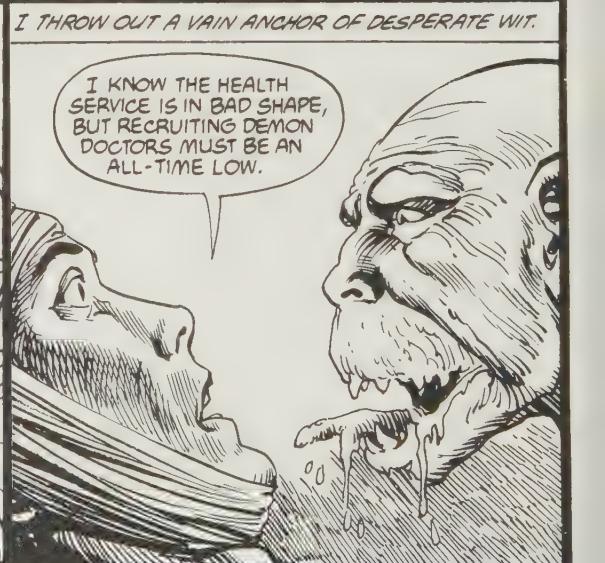


A FLOOD OF BOILING TERROR
PICKS ME UP AND WHIRLS
ME, HELPLESS IN ITS FOAM.



I THROW OUT A VAIN ANCHOR OF DESPERATE WIT.

I KNOW THE HEALTH
SERVICE IS IN BAD SHAPE,
BUT RECRUITING DEMON
DOCTORS MUST BE AN
ALL-TIME LOW.



AH, CONSTANTINE. I'M SORRY,
DID I STARTLE YOU?

I WAS JUST GOING
TO TAKE YOUR TEMPERATURE.

SHALL WE
CALL IT A SLIP
OF THE
TONGUE?

YOU LOOKED SO
PEACEFUL LYING THERE, I
WAS AFRAID YOU'D
SHUFFLED OFF THE
MORTAL COIL.

CALL IT WHAT YOU
LIKE, PAL. BUT I NEVER
KISS ANYONE 'TIL I'VE
BEEN INTRODUCED.

YOU MEAN YOU
DON'T REMEMBER
ME? I'M HURT.

WE'RE OLD
ACQUAINTANCES.
WHY, IT'S BEEN
SCANT WEEKS
SINCE WE LAST
SPOKE.

SURELY YOU RECALL OUR
TELEPHONE CONVERSATION,
IN WHICH I INVITED YOU
TO JOIN MY LITTLE BAND
OF HORRORISTS.

SO YOU'RE THE JOKER BEHIND THE
DAMNATION ARMY. WELL, YOU'RE
SNIFFING AROUND THE WRONG
LAMPOST HERE, CHUM.

ONE THING I LEARNED FROM
MY OLD DAD-- NEVER VOLUNTEER.

OH DEAR, HAVE I
MISLED YOU? I DIDN'T
MEAN TO IMPLY YOU HAD
A CHOICE. YOUR CO-
OPERATION IS NOT
REQUESTED, BUT
REQUIRED.

I FEAR YOUR
CIRCUMSTANCE
PRECLUDES
REFUSAL. YOU
SEE, YOU'RE
HELPLESS.

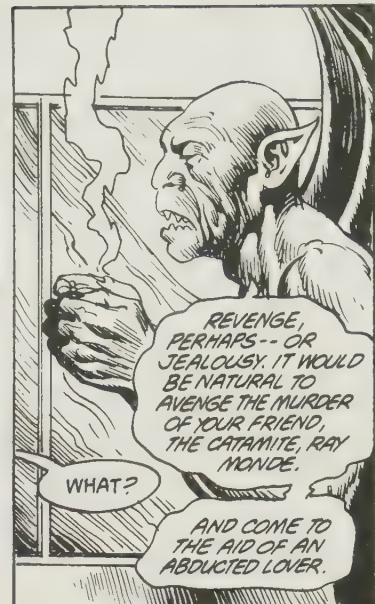
YOU SILLY PRATT.
DO YOU THINK I'M
SCARED OF PAIN?

AAACH!

SHRIKKK

WHAT CAN
YOU DO? BREAK
MY BLOODY
LEGS?

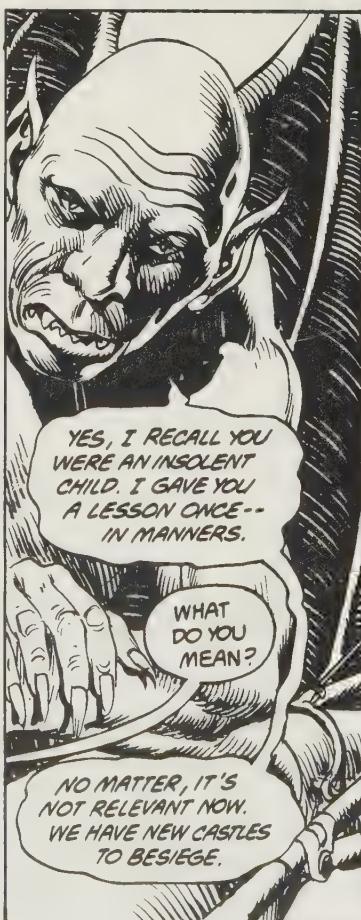
HAHAHA
HAHAHA





"BELOW THIS FLOOR IS THE MATERNITY WARD. IMAGINE IT, A VERITABLE CHOCOLATE BOX OF FRAGILE, MEWLING INNOCENCE.





"HELL WAS CONTENT,
PERHAPS COMPLACENT--
LAZY, EVEN. WE DID NOT
NEED TO PROSELYTIZE
OUR CAUSE. NUMEROUS
PILGRIMS OFFERED
THEMSELVES WILLINGLY
TO OUR COURT.

"HUMANS LEARNED SECRETS
THEY HAD NO RIGHT TO SHARE--
AND STUPIDLY TRIED TO MAKE
A GIFT OF EARTH TO THE
ANTIQUE BLACKNESS THAT
HAD LAIN QUIET FOR EONS
FAR BEYOND THE WALLS OF
HELL."

"BUT THEN SOMETHING
OCCURRED IN WHICH
YOU PLAYED A MINOR
PART.

CUT OUT THE
OBSCURE METAPHORS
AND GIVE ME THE
BOTTOM LINE, MATE.

THERE HAS BEEN A PROPHECY,
INCONTOVERTIBLE--
ENGRAVED ON A STONE
DREDGED UP FROM HELL.

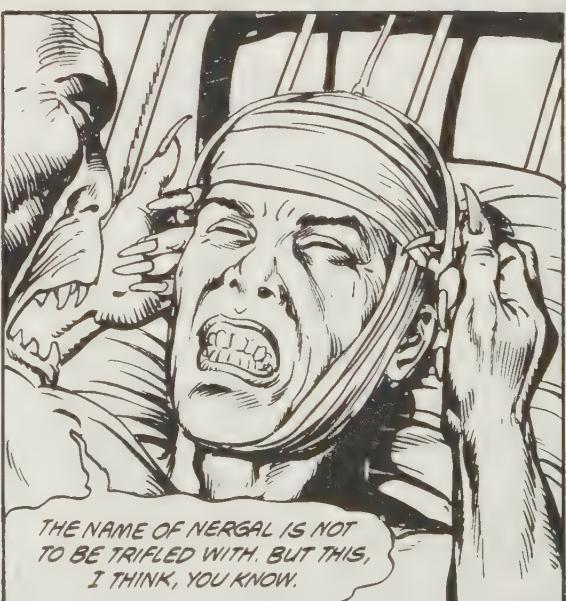
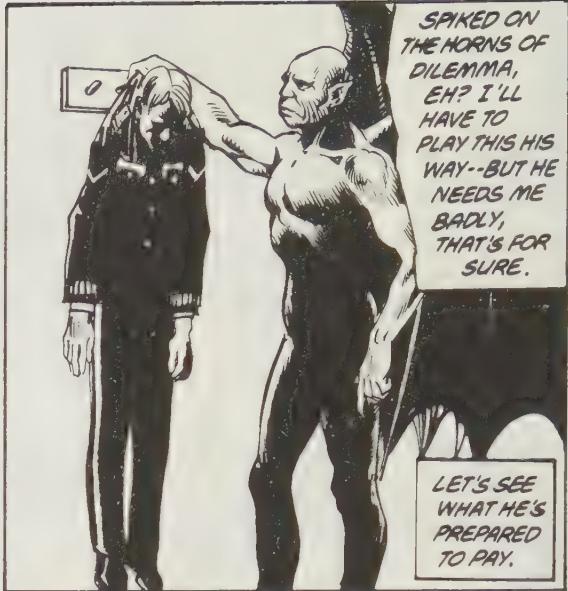
IT PREDICTS, AT THE WINTER
SOLSTICE, A CONJUNCTION
BETWEEN NATURE AND SUPER-
NATURE-- A BIRTH.

IT'S HAPPENING
AGAIN. GOD
BORN OF WOMAN.
AND THE FEMALE
YOU CALL ZED--
THEY CALL THE
MARY.

STRENGTH!

THE "CHILD"
WILL BE A
HEALING POWER
IN THIS
REALM.

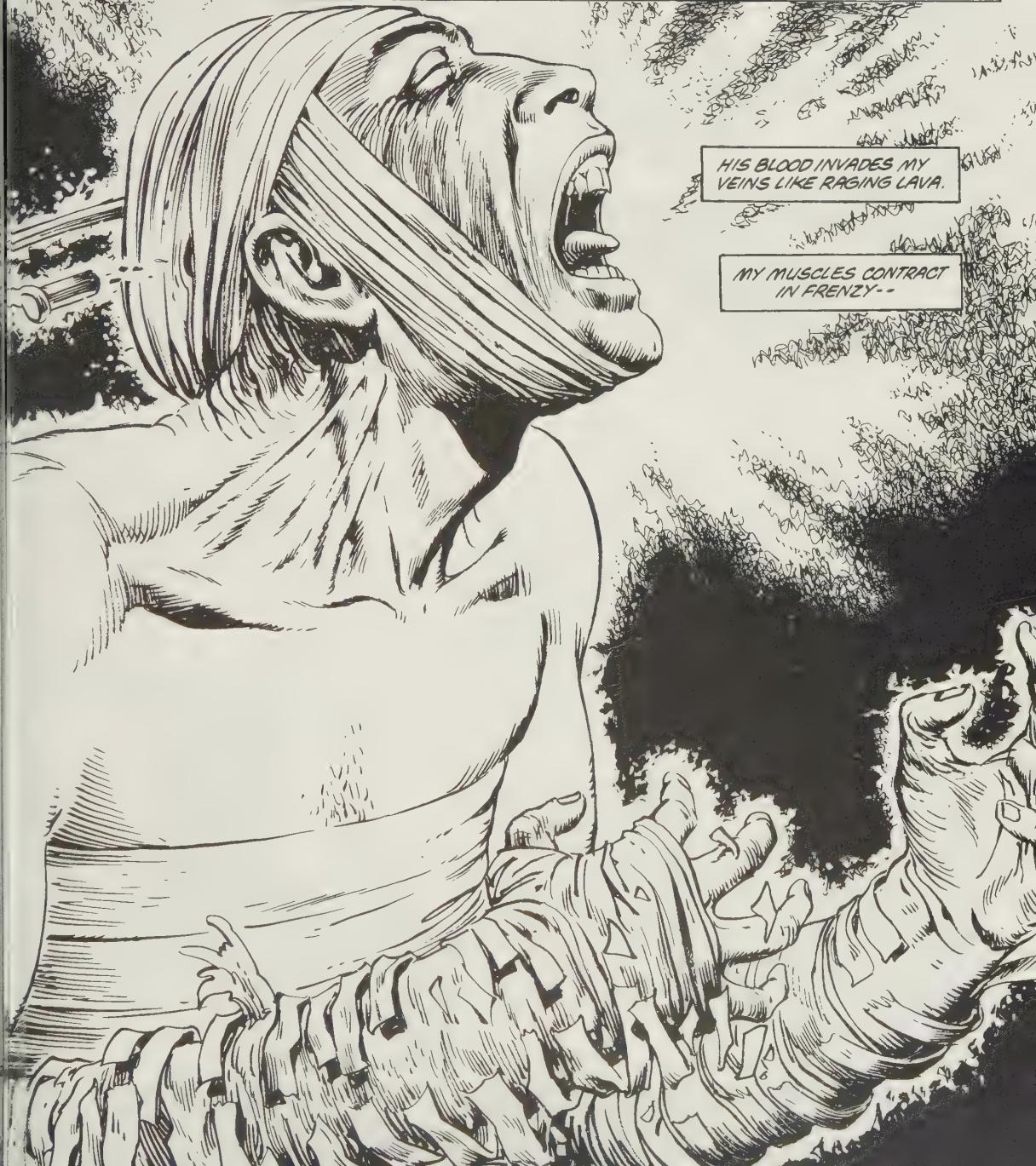


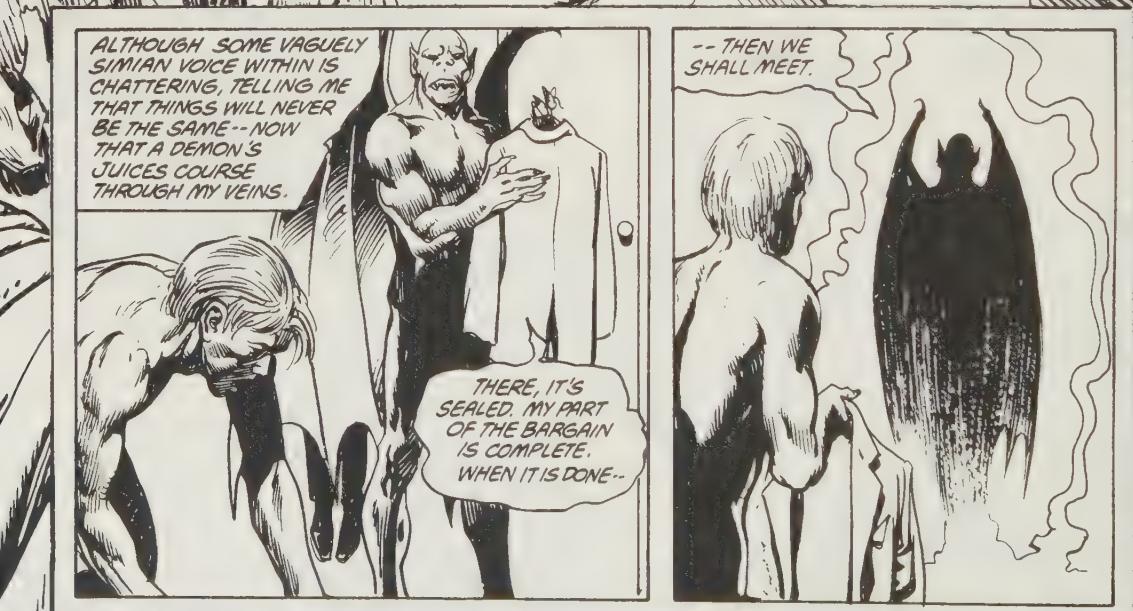
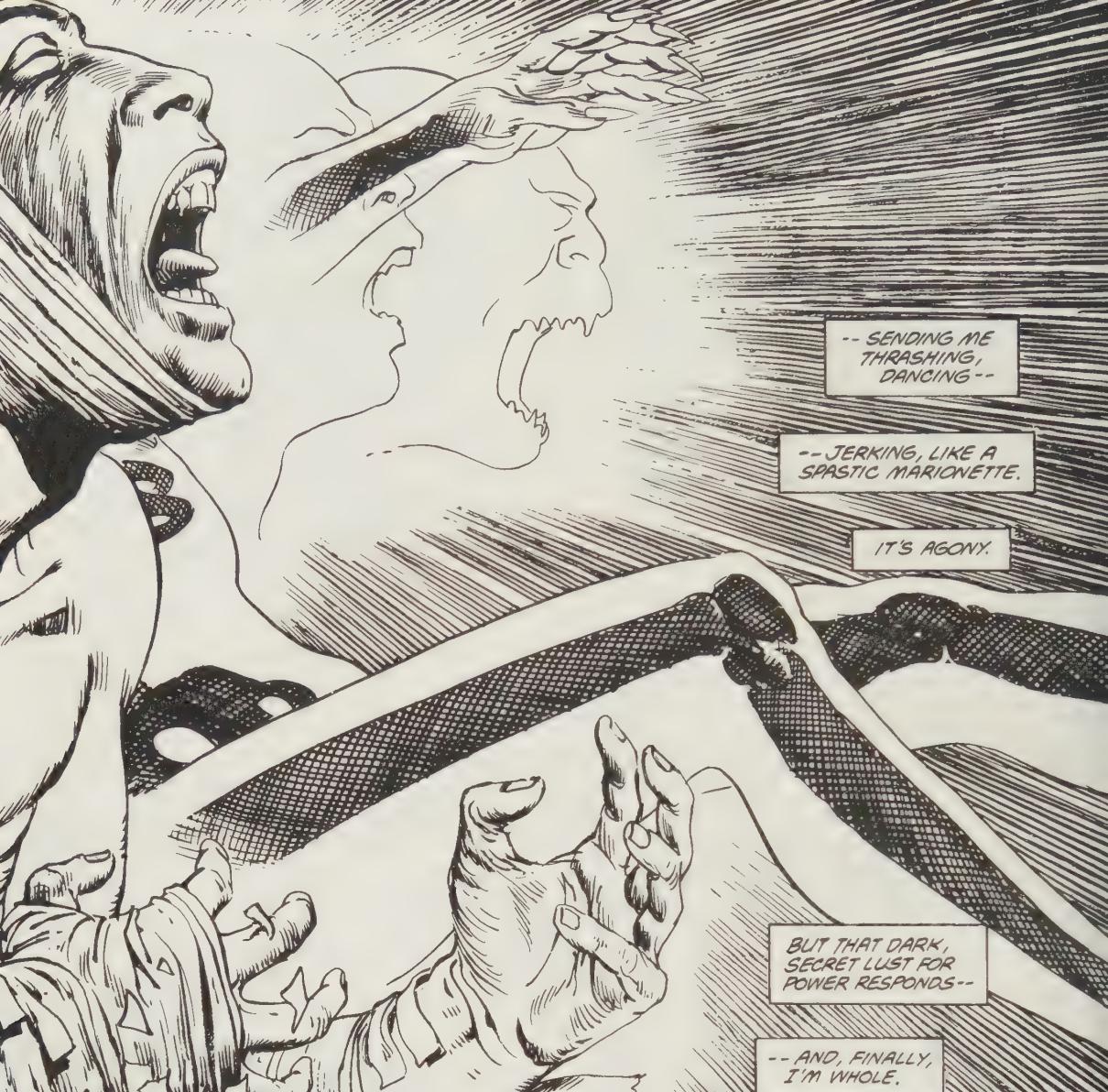




VERY WELL.
ALTHOUGH I
WARN YOU, FAST
REMEDIES ARE
EXTREME.

AAAH!!





WITHOUT A SECOND THOUGHT I LEAVE BEHIND A TRAIL OF FRIENDS BETRAYED, A DEAD POLICEMAN, A RUINED HOSPITAL WARD.

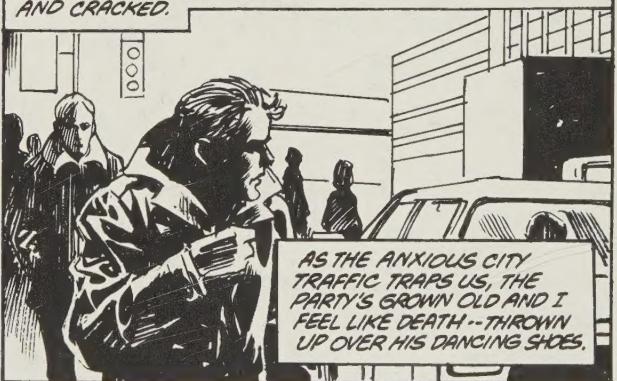
BUT I SLOUGH OFF THIS BURDEN WITH THE FURIOUS JOY OF A SLAVE SHEDDING HIS SHACKLES.



LIKE TYPHOID MARY TRAILING THE PLAGUE IN MY WAKE, I MOVE ON TO FRESH FIELDS.



BUT, BY THE TIME MY ROARING JUGGERNAUT HAS BORN ME BACK TO TOWN, MY MASK OF IMMORTALITY IS FADING AND CRACKED.



DISASTER'S SNAPPING AT MY HEELS AND IT'S TIME THAT I WAS SOMEWHERE FAR AWAY. IT'S ALL UP TO ME AGAIN, ENNIT? SOMEHOW, I'VE GOT TO STAY AHEAD AND GET SOME NEWACES UP MY SLEEVE.

CAGED BY MY RIBS, MY HEART SCREAMS LIKE FIGHTING CARS. THE DEMONIC TRANSFUSION'S DONE THE TRICK, ALL RIGHT -- CHARGING MY BODY WITH FEARSOME ENERGY.

USA:
NYC
MIAMI
CHICAGO
LOWEST PRICES
FOR IMMEDIATE
DEPARTURE

DISCOUNT
TRAVEL

BUT RIGHT NOW, ALL I REALLY NEED'S A SMOKE.

END

III



HELLBLAZER

VOLUME TWO

"Hellblazer stands at the cutting edge of English horror"

CLIVE BARKER

*He is the man caught in the middle.
Between the Damnation Army and the*

Resurrection Crusaders.

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